

THE DREAM OF MODERNITY:
FINDING MEANING IN THE MODERN TRADITION

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that in order for philosophy to move forward without undue baggage, post-modernism should be addressed from the analytic perspective—including the contemporary philosophy that has grown out of it. This paper takes up that task with relation to Derrida’s “Différance” through a discussion of language and meaning in Frege, Russell, Quine and Paul Churchland. In discussing the differences between these thinkers’ theories of meaning we can see that post-modernism, at least with regard to Derrida’s account of language and meaning in “Différance,” was a false start that ultimately provided an unnecessary critique of modern positions. This is due, in part, to a misunderstanding of the modern tradition itself, and an incorrect interpretation of Nietzsche. In the course of making this argument, we gain insight into the commonalities shared by the two major branches of the modern tradition (analytic philosophy and continental philosophy) and can see that they provide complementary accounts of language and meaning (Churchland’s neurosemantics and Habermas’ communicative reason).

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Candice Shelby

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Steve and Jisele, for putting up with my incessant questions, and to my wife Laura, for putting up with my incessant answers. Without their patience and support over the years, I never would have been able to take this silliness so seriously.

I love you all.

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PREFACE

Suffice to say, modernism is somewhat complicated.

For most of those working in the modern tradition—particularly its more analytically flavored branch—the “problems” pointed out by the post-moderns are not actually problems at all, and certainly not worth the time to address them. For these moderns, what addressing needs to be done has already been done. This attitude has led to the fact that most moderns dismiss post-modernism entirely. Still, there are some within the modern tradition who tackle issues highlighted by post-moderns; this is best exemplified in Nagel’s *The View From Nowhere*, which tackles issues relating to the split between subjectivity and objectivity. That said, as many moderns are bound to point out: these “crossovers” of the *The View From Nowhere* sort are not really crossovers at all. Instead, they are cases in which moderns tackle issues that arose within the modern tradition—there is no need to “crossover” to post-modernity, in tackling concerns relating to modern accounts from within the modern tradition. Objectivity, for example, the question Nagel tackles in *The View From Nowhere*, is not a question pursued solely by post-modernists, and tackling it does not make one a post-modern. If anything, it just makes someone ambitious.

However, for those who draw upon the post-modern tradition, the concerns of the movement are more relevant. Marking oneself a “post-modern” or even consciously living in the wake of post-modernism implies a belief that a departure has been made from the modern tradition—that modernism is in some way defunct, or at the very least naïve. This attitude gives rise to a number of claims by post-modernists and their

sympathizers that modernism is “positivistic,” “scientistic”—in the pejorative sense—as well “logocentric.” Claims that modernism is “positivistic” and “scientistic” can be found throughout Heidegger’s phenomenological skepticism. Foucault and Habermas (along with the Frankfurt School in general) similarly attack modernism’s “positivistic” tendencies. The claim of modern scientism then goes on to appear in Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The critique of modern logocentrism inevitably relies primarily on Derrida’s analysis of language. For these thinkers, modernism is said to be “positivistic” in that it supposedly disregards intuition; requiring all knowledge to be rational and based in sensory experience. It is then said to be “scientistic” in that it supposedly believes the only valid pursuit of knowledge is through the scientific method. Modernism’s supposed “logocentrism” then refers to a supposedly undeniable aspect of modern theories in which they privilege “logos” above all else. This charge is based on the belief that modern theories assume there is some definite irreducible thing through which our experience is mediated—a platonic form, for example. Along these lines, post-moderns such as Jacques Derrida believe modernism is lacking an ability to deal with the fluidity of knowledge and meaning due to its privileging the “word” or “reference” in the formation of meaning. This, as we will see, is not necessarily the case. Regardless, post-moderns do not dismiss modernism in quite the same way that moderns dismiss post-modernism. Modernism is definitive of post-modernism in at least the oppositional sense. The point at which post-moderns *are* dismissive of modernism in the same way the moderns are of post-modernism is in relation to contemporary modern positions which—they believe—are based on failed foundations.

This dismissiveness on both sides of the divide is rarely overcome. Habermas is one of the few avowed moderns to take post-modernism seriously, and he works within the continental tradition—a modern tradition, but one that has always been sympathetic to post-modernism, due to the roots that it shares with the post-modern movement. So, with so few moderns taking post-modernism seriously, it is important that the issue be considered from a modern perspective. Habermas can't be the only one to tackle post-modernism—it's much too slippery for one man to hold down, and it has been known to throw an elbow here and there.

For this reason, it is especially important that post-modernism be considered from an analytic perspective. The two movements—post-modernism and analytic philosophy—share a close temporal proximity. This fact, combined with the vast differences between the two, provides evidence that they comprise two distinct theoretical paths that diverged at the start of the 20th century. Once we have analyzed these two roads to an account of how language works, we can see that the post-modern account is an unnecessary detour. In doing so, we arrive at a theoretical perspective at which we can view the conflict between modernism and post-modernism in general. This is made possible, in part, because theories of meaning are conceptually central to the traditions in which they appear.

In addition, by lending an analytic hand to Habermas we have the opportunity to present a theory of modernism that helps bridge the gap between the continental and analytic branches of the modern tradition. This is possible by providing an account of analytic modernism that mirrors Habermas' account of continental modernism's internal "counter-discourse" (which has existed since Nietzsche) that makes the post-modern

detour unnecessary. With this done, contemporary modern philosophy can move forward as a unified—if not differentiated—movement and without undue baggage. It can do this without ignoring the post-modern movement (as it often does) and without completely re-inventing itself (as many post-moderns seem to advocate). This is made possible by understanding the post-modern movement as a mistake—a false start—that never truly got off the ground due to two factors: a misreading of the modern tradition's goals, and its own prejudices. This paper is dedicated to bringing the analytic tradition to bear on post-modernism, in order to arrive at this understanding and move on.

CHAPTER I

TRADITIONS AND GOALS

The viability of the modern tradition has been questioned nearly from its inception. Each successive entry into the discourse of modernity has been to propose a revision, or an outright critique of the discourse. This process of self-reflection can be said to have come to a head in French philosophy during the latter half of the 20th century with the post-modern movement. However, modernism continues to find its champions. These champions all find varying solutions to post-modern critiques and their solutions make a persuasive argument for the viability of the modern tradition, and post-modernism's status as a mistake or a false start. For the purposes of this paper, we will limit discussion of modernism's viability to the role of language and the formation of meaning. However, we should first be clear what we're talking about when we say "the modern tradition" or "modernism."

The Goal of Modernism

In discussing something as large as a philosophical tradition, it is helpful to simplify. In this vein, what seems most simple and yet representative of a tradition is its goal. So, what is the goal of modernism? We might be tempted to look for hints in the term "modern" itself. In this particular case, the surface level usage of the term can only go so far, and no doubt this has caused some amount of confusion in its use. As far as philosophy goes, the most superficial sense in which "modern" can be taken is "in opposition to traditional." However, the extent and type of oppositional nature that "modern" has with regard to "traditional" cannot be seen without digging a bit deeper. In analyzing the term's usage, we can see that "modern" should not be taken simply as

opposed to "traditional." Instead, it is only initially constituted by that opposition. Modernism is not any one thing when separated from that opposition. Rationalism, empiricism, and idealism are all modern movements despite their disagreements. This is because they all have this systematic opposition to traditional beliefs and their inherent dogmatism at their core. 'Tradition,' in this case, means: inherited beliefs presented as a given body of knowledge.

In this sense, the modern enterprise encourages individual experimentation and interrogation of traditional thought; this is what makes it an "enterprise" in the first place. In addition, what becomes clear with this definition is that modernism is concerned with progress. Progress, in this case means: moving toward more nuanced and less dogmatic theories without an assumption of an ultimate end. To be modern is to strive forward without being restrained by the limitations of the past, and without artificially limiting future progress. In this way, theoretical freedom is paramount in the modern tradition. However, this active sense of 'modern' can be—and has been—difficult for contemporary philosophers to apprehend. This is due to the fact that modernism itself has become "traditional" at times, and it is reliant on tradition (in the "given body of knowledge" sense) as a starting point. This may explain why some philosophers still find themselves caught in a loop, constantly returning to the past for answers and unable to break free. It also explains why others take the sense in which "modern" is opposed to "tradition" to an extreme and attempt to break from the modern enterprise itself.

An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?

So far we have discussed modernism without reference to any specific modern works. We should rectify that. Luckily, everything that we have said about modernism

can be found in a discussion of Kant's "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" In discussing "What is Enlightenment?" we have to make one concession for the sake of clarity. That concession is: while there are plain practical and political motivations for Kant's writing the essay, those practical and political motivations should not be seen as delimiting the scope of his argument. Rather, they provide a practical application of Kant's overarching concept of enlightenment. So, in discussing "What Is Enlightenment?" we will leave Kant's thoughts on Frederick II and late 18th century life in Prussia at the door in our pursuit of a philosophical analysis of enlightenment and its relationship to the goal of modernism.

Kant's opening statement says it all: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity."¹ In this statement Kant implies that we have been burdened by our own immaturity, and enlightenment relieves us of this burden. In this sense, 'emergence' functions similarly to 'emancipation.' However, we should ask what Kant means by 'self-incurred.' In other translations, this occasionally pops up as 'self-imposed,' which seems to point in the same general direction. However, 'self-incurred' is the better term. 'Self-incurred' gives a slightly more neutral reading of the situation—a sense that through our actions we have burdened ourselves unintentionally. So, we might say that 'self-incurred' could be read here as 'unintentionally created.'

Moving to the term 'immaturity,' Kant provides his own definition: "Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another."² So, 'immaturity' is an inability to take personal responsibility for your own use of reason.

¹ Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" (Königsberg, September 30, 1784), 1.

² Ibid.

Kant reinforces this interpretation in describing how 'immaturity' comes to be self-incurred. For Kant, our immaturity is self-incurred due to our lack of "resolution and courage" to use our reason without guidance from another. Kant believes it is extremely convenient for us to remain immature, moreover, he holds that those whom we have relied upon to guide us have ensured that we see moving past this immaturity as quite dangerous.³ This complex picture of 'immaturity' as a lack of personal responsibility, and a reliance on others coupled with laziness and fear will help us further unpack Kant's initial definition of enlightenment—however, it is still missing a key component, and this is the sense in which Kant wants to say we are burdened by our immaturity. This burden of immaturity lies in dogmas and formulas. These "are the ball and chain of [our] permanent immaturity."⁴ Immaturity is not just an unwillingness to use our own understanding without the guidance of another due to our lack of resolution and courage. It is also a restricted state where we are held back by unchallenged dogmatic beliefs.

So, when Kant says, "enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity," we can unpack that statement as, "enlightenment is our emancipation from our unintentionally created reliance upon tradition." This reading of "An Answer to The Question: What is Enlightenment?" coupled with Kant's unambiguous status as a modern philosopher supports our previous discussion of the goal of the modern enterprise. Modernism is defined by its rejection of dogmatic tradition in the pursuit of progress in the sense of "theoretical freedom" we defined above. Tradition, once again, should be taken in the "given body of knowledge" sense.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The Goal of Post-Modernism

The goal of post-modernism is harder to pin down. It might be tempting to say that post-modernism's goal is the opposite of modernism's. However, this is not the case. If we take "modernism" to mean the same thing in this context as it did above, we arrive at a reading of post-modernism according to which its goal is to move beyond an opposition to tradition. Perhaps more accurately, we might say that the name "post-modern" is given to philosophy that believes it has already moved beyond modernism itself because it has failed to move beyond tradition, and is not theoretically free. This second reading is more accurate than the first, but it still does not capture post-modernism. After all, post-modernism *is* opposed to at least one tradition—the modern tradition.

Without recourse to the sort of interpretation we relied on in sketching out modernism, it is hard to talk meaningfully about the goal of post-modernism. However, one option still remains: tracing post-modernism's development in order to see whether it strikes out in any particular direction. This direction, if there is one, might say something about post-modernism's goal. Along these lines, post-modernism is said to have its roots in the work of Nietzsche and other skeptical philosophers. In *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals* in particular, Nietzsche's skepticism leads him to attack contemporary accounts of the world and morality. These attacks are particularly strong, and serve as an obvious touchstone in post-modern philosophy. Deleuze in particular was admittedly influenced by Nietzsche's thought.⁵ However, post-moderns claim numerous other figures, many of whom were also influenced by Nietzsche. A few of the more

⁵ See: Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

obvious figures included in this group are Heidegger, Adorno (particularly his *Negative Dialectics*) and Arendt (especially in “The Vita Activa and the Modern Age”).

Drawing connections in this way shows the growth of the post-modern movement out of skepticism (Nietzsche), phenomenological skepticism (Heidegger), and finally pessimism (Adorno and Arendt). This final evolution of phenomenological skepticism into pessimism has to do with modernism's ability to accomplish the goals it set out for itself at the time Adorno and Arendt were writing, and a belief that modernism is not free to explore other positions. Without going into these thinkers and their works in depth, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Adorno and Arendt should at least serve as signposts along the road to post-modernism. With the road to post-modernism traced in this manner, post-modernism's development can be seen as an increase in pessimism among continental philosophers during the early 20th century. This then points to post-modernism's goal: to cease relying upon what it sees as failed modern methods and concepts, and strike out in a new, more free direction. This is precisely the goal of Jacques Derrida, and this can be seen in his concept of “différance,” which is built in such a way as to avoid traditional logocentric accounts of meaning.

CHAPTER II

SENSES AND REFERENCES AND DOGMATIC DIFFÉRANCES

With modernism and post-modernism sketched out, we can turn to a discussion of their differences when it comes to their treatment of the role of language and the formation of meaning, and show how it is that the post-modern position is a mistake. In analyzing these differences, we will discuss a major post-modern account of language and meaning before turning to a discussion of one branch of the modern account of language and meaning. In this case, we will be discussing Derrida's "Différance" before turning to 20th century analytic accounts of language and meaning. Without an in-depth discussion of how "Différance" relates to each successive entry in a modern branch of philosophy of language and meaning, it is unlikely a complete understanding of the issue can be achieved.

After discussing "Différance" we will tackle three analytic accounts, across four papers, in chronological order. We will move from "Différance" to a discussion of Frege's "On Sense and Reference" which was actually published in the late 19th century. Following that, we will consider Russell's "On Denoting," which serves as the next major development in modern philosophy of language. From there, we will discuss Quine's "On What There Is"—a substantial addendum to Russell's "On Denoting." We will then end our discussion of the development of this branch of modern philosophy with Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." "Two Dogmas" is a further development of Quine's minimalist ontology (originally presented in "On What There Is") into a more robust form of holism. Through this discussion, we will see how "Différance" is a substantial critique of modern accounts of language and meaning, but ultimately

unnecessary due to Derrida's misreading of the modern tradition's goals. We will also see that Derrida's approach lacks the ability to account for a number of phenomena that the modern account is able to account for—in part because the modern account has a practical foundation in empiricism.

Différance

"Différance," by Jacques Derrida, is a perfect example of a "post-modern" account of language and meaning. It has strong connections to French philosophy during the mid twentieth century, and it touches on a number of different issues typically highlighted by post-modern philosophy: the importance of context, pessimism with regard to traditional philosophy, and a willingness to push the limits normally placed on interpretative analysis. It is also an example of post-modernism's inability to provide a theory of meaning that obviates modern theories of meaning like Frege's, Russell's, and Quine's. However, before we can credibly label "Différance" a failure in this way, we should take a moment to understand "Différance" on its own terms and then see how it relates to Frege's, Russell's, and Quine's theories.

To start, we should begin with the term 'différance.' For clarity, when discussing the term we will use 'différance,' and when discussing the associated concept, we will use "différance." 'Différance' is a neologism that Derrida uses in order to conduct what he calls a "writing on writing" as well as a "writing within writing." Both of these phrases will become clear once we have delineated what exactly 'différance' means. Derrida believes the term carries two different senses of equal importance. 'Différance,' in this way, marks both conceptual temporization through a detour, and conceptual discernibility

through spacing. It is the "becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time"⁶ in the formation of meaning. According to Derrida, regular old 'difference' does not carry with it these two senses, and so we need a new term that can carry them both in order to adequately account for meaning, and its peculiarities.

However, what do these two senses of 'différance' mean? When the senses are presented out of context, it is difficult to say. So, in answering this question we have to talk about the context in which they are presented. This context is one in which there is a systematic emphasis on the importance of context itself in the formation of meaning and knowledge in general. Derrida, along with other post-moderns, is intensely interested in context. For Derrida, context of the sort that gives rise to meaning relies fundamentally on differences between signs, and likewise the meaning of "différance" relies on signs being seen in context with each other. Derrida takes Saussure's conception of differences between signs and expands it in order to make 'différance' mark the "play of differences" between signs, and the "possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general."⁷ In other words, "différance" is Derrida's lynch pin of context and differences between signs through which we arrive at meaning—it is the one essential concept without which meaning could not exist.

Now seen in this light, the "becoming-time of space" refers to the time involved in the interpretation of terms that, along a Saussureian line, always point back to other related and oppositional terms. In this sense, the meaning of a term is delayed or put off onto another term. Terms for Saussure, and Derrida, do not have meaning outside of the

⁶ Derrida, Jacques. "Différance." In *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 8.

⁷ Ibid, 11.

systems of language they belong to and the connections within those systems. So, in order to arrive at the meaning of one term, you must first take a detour through other terms in the same system. In taking this detour, the space between the terms is experienced temporally as a gap between signifiers and the signified. "Meaning" then requires time between terms in order to develop. Likewise, "the becoming-space of time" relies on this same interpretation but heads in the other direction. Through reading 'différance' as "the becoming-space of time" we see that in our detour through other terms in pursuit of meaning, the time required in bridging the gaps between terms becomes a gap in conceptual space. "Meaning" then requires conceptual space between terms in order to develop. Seen in this light, "différance" is meant to encapsulate both the active and passive aspect of context through differences between signs and the necessity of gaps between terms in the formation of meaning. "Différance" is then both the deferring and the differentiating aspect of being which gives rise to meaning. This is why Derrida chooses the particular form of the term he does. In his words, "the ending -ance remains undecided between the active and the passive," it is the "middle voice."⁸

A concrete example of these two different aspects of "différance" can be seen in the term 'bachelor.' First, according to Derrida the term is seen in the context of the system of language in which it exists. Through existing in context, the meaning of 'bachelor' is created through its relationship with other terms—such as 'unmarried,' 'man,' 'husband,' 'wife' etc.—and the sort of relationship it has to those terms. Making these connections to other terms requires time. In this way, the space between terms is temporal (the becoming time of space). Second, the meaning of 'bachelor,' is reliant on

⁸ Ibid, 9.

the time required to trace these connections in that such time creates conceptual space between the terms to begin with.

Derrida's motivation for this account of meaning is due to his opposition to atomistic interpretations of meaning in which there are terms, and their meanings exist fully formed "out there," or even inside our own minds.⁹ In

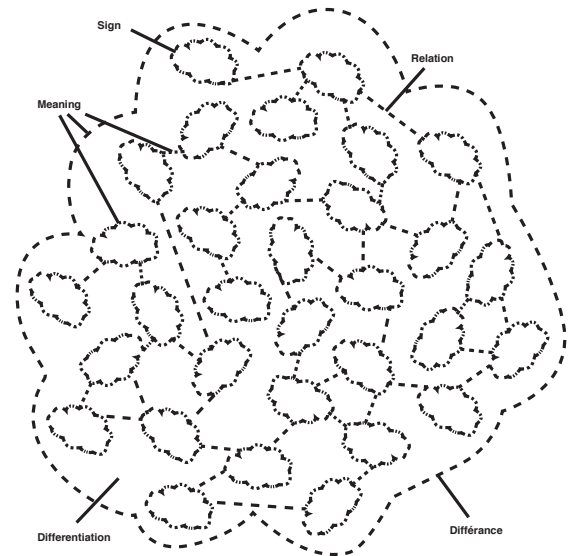


Figure I. Derrida's Theory of Meaning

"Différance," Derrida wants to point out that meaning does not proceed along atomistic lines. There is a gap between signifiers and signifieds due to the structure of language itself, and this gap is constitutive of meaning. In holding this position, he strikes out against both the Platonic and Kantian conceptions of meaning. Given his opposition to these more atomistic interpretations, the concept of "différance" can be seen as his answer to the problem of meaning, through an emphasis on the differences between terms, and their systemic (rather than empirical) context. Along this line, Derrida defines 'différance' as "the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences."¹⁰ A graphical interpretation of Derrida's theory of meaning can be seen in Figure I.

With "différance" fleshed out in this way, we can see why Derrida refers to his usage of the term as being in pursuit of a "writing on writing" and a "writing within

⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹⁰ Ibid, 12.

writing." "Différance" is a writing on writing in the sense that throughout the essay, Derrida is concerned with understanding the system of writing and its functioning. However, by virtue of "différance," the essay should also be seen as a writing made possible by the system of writing to begin with. At this point, we can begin to guess how "Différance" relates to modern accounts of language and meaning like Frege's, Russell's, and Quine's. "Différance" consists of three significant critiques of modern accounts of language and meaning. To begin with, Derrida believes modern accounts are unable to account for meaning through context in the sense of conceptual temporization and spacing. In this way, they are logocentric. In addition, they are overly atomistic because they do not recognize the gap between signifiers and signified and its importance in the formation of meaning. Finally, modern accounts are Platonic or Kantian in nature, and in that way, they are dogmatically tied to tradition. In this way, "Différance" fits our previous definition of post-modernism where we defined it as an attempt to move beyond modernism and the concepts upon which modern thought relies to a more "free" mode of inquiry.

Frege and Russell

Now let us turn to a discussion of the modern accounts of language and meaning. First, Frege's "On Sense and Reference." "OSaR" is intended to address an apparent problem with the traditional modern account of language and meaning—specifically, the question of "equality." "Equality" is referred to by a number of different names, and relied upon by a number of related concepts (such as analyticity). However, Frege specifically wants to know what sort of thing "equality" is. "Is it a relation? A relation

between objects, or between names or signs of objects?"¹¹ This question resurfaces under different names and associated concepts throughout Russell's "On Denoting" as well as Quine's "On What There Is." It is particularly important in Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism."

When Frege asks about "equality," he's asking whether it is a relationship between a thing and itself, or a thing and its name/sign. For example, when I say that a bachelor is an unmarried man, a statement we might translate as " $a = b$," am I saying something equivalent to " $a = a$," or am I saying that the terms " a " and " b " are both names/signs for some other object " o "? According to Frege, the statement " $a = b$ " implies that " a " and " b " designate the same thing (" o "), and so the relationship that is asserted in equality statements deals with differences between signs. This is because there must be a difference in the way each sign presents the designated object for us to ever have a need to say something of the " $a = b$ " form. This difference in the ways the signs present the object comes down to what Frege calls "the sense of the sign."¹²

However, Frege notes that senses can be difficult to pin down at times. Frege contends that for every expression that belongs to a finite system of signs there should only be one sense. Unfortunately, natural languages don't measure up to this requirement. For example, "bachelor" has a different sense when applied to a type of flower ("bachelor's buttons") than when applied to a marriageable but unmarried man. So, Frege says, we must be "...content if the same word has the same sense in the same context."¹³

¹¹ Frege, Gottlob. "On Sense and Reference." In *Meaning*, edited by Mark Richard. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 36.

¹² Ibid, 37.

¹³ Ibid, 38.

In this way, natural languages rely on referential (empirical) context to provide a particular sense.

Even when we parse signs this way—into a reference, and a sense (dependent on empirical context or not)—we still have to account for what Frege calls "the associated idea."¹⁴ This associated idea is, for Frege, an internal image attached to a sign that gains its shape through all of the different experiences an individual has had with the sign's reference. As such, the associated idea "varies and oscillates... The idea is subjective: one man's idea is not that of another."¹⁵ This "associated idea" might seem to make it hard to speak substantively about what others mean, but this is not a significant issue. This is because, Frege says, "one can hardly deny that mankind has a common store of thoughts which is transmitted from one generation to another" and because we have this common store of thoughts—which are senses—we can safely limit ourselves to speaking of the sense of a term without worrying too much about the associated idea.¹⁶

This is an inevitable concession when speaking of signs in this way because, while we can occasionally establish where two individual's ideas or experiences differ, they cannot be objectively compared. Two different ideas of the same thing cannot exist within the same consciousness, and that is the only way we seem able to access them. As for the potentially subjective nature of the sense of a term, Frege is not concerned. This is because while each individual may have a slightly different sense of a term, those different senses are still "objective" in that they are held in common and can be used

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 38-39.

¹⁶ Ibid, 39.

effectively by several observers referring to the same thing.¹⁷ Thus, through the way they function, Frege's senses are similar to Platonic forms or ideals, even if they are not strictly speaking Platonic.

Frege formulates his theory of meaning by saying, "A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) expresses its sense, and stands for or designates its reference. By means of a

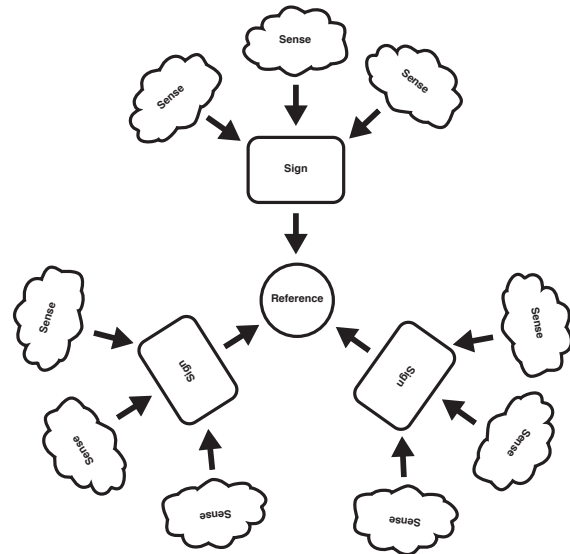


Figure II. Frege's Theory of Meaning

sign we express its sense and designate its reference."¹⁸ A graphical interpretation of Frege's theory of meaning can be seen in Figure II. This theory is built in such a way as to preserve the value and usefulness of determining the "truth" of a statement. In other words, we need to have recourse to senses and references "[b]ecause, and to the extent that, we are concerned with [a statement's] truth value."¹⁹ In fact, for Frege, the reference of a sentence (as opposed to a singular term) is its truth value. This might sound like something of a leap, but for Frege, sentences constitute judgments and "in every judgment, no matter how trivial, the step from the level of thoughts to the level of reference (the objective) has already been taken."²⁰ Ultimately, the issue of identity arises because two terms can have two different cognitive values while having the same reference (or truth value in the case of sentences). So, it is useful to have recourse to the

¹⁷ Ibid, 40.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 42.

²⁰ Ibid, 42-43.

concept of equality for the purpose of increased knowledge.²¹ In other words, "equality," and Frege's theory of meaning in general, is used pragmatically in pursuit of increased knowledge.

When looking at Frege's account of language and meaning, it is clear to see where Derrida's three critiques apply. First, Frege's theory does not even begin to create the sort of conceptual space inherent in "différance," because the former proceeds along linear lines. A sense is tied to a sign, and a sign is tied to a referent. Meaning, in this Fregeian model, exists fully formed as "sense," and only needs to be connected to a sign in order to be used in communication with others about the external world. Senses do not rely on other senses, or even signs—they exist on their own, and therefore no "system" that produces meaning needs to be identified. Frege certainly accounts for the system of language, but he accounts for it in the same way a logician accounts for a system of symbolic logic in that semantics are abstracted to some other process. Frege's account is then incredibly logocentric.

Second, Frege preserves Derrida's differences between signs, but instead of differences being constitutive of meaning, they are simply a fact of language. If there are different signs, they have different senses, and therefore different "meanings." The differences between signs exist because of differences in meanings, not the other way around. That Frege's discussion of different signs centers around issues of reference further illuminates the fact that for Frege, meaning may be tied to signs (at least in communication), but it is not made by them. In this way, meaning is atomistic in Frege's account, and tied to empirical states of affairs.

²¹ Ibid, 56.

We have already hinted that Derrida's third critique—that modern accounts are either Platonic or Kantian and in that way they are dogmatic—applies to Frege. Frege's use of senses as functionally equivalent to Platonic ideals is plain to see in his discussion of how communication is possible. Whether this is actually dogmatic or not requires a bit more interpretation and discussion of "On Sense and Reference's" philosophical context than we have the time for here. But, we can certainly see how Derrida might argue that in relying on this sort of Platonic conception of meaning, Frege at least *looks* a bit dogmatic.

Through this discussion of Frege and Derrida's critiques of modern accounts of language and meaning we can see that if a modern account is going to be immune to Derrida's critiques, it has to account for meaning *in context* (not just be tied to it in a linear fashion), move away from atomism, and strike out in a new direction as far as an account of meaning's existence goes. Russell's "On Denoting" starts us on a path toward such a modern account. "On Denoting" takes a number of cues from Frege but moves away from a discussion of equality in favor of developing a more robust theory of "reference" than Frege provided. Russell's motivation here is to address the issue, inherent in Frege's atomistic account, of signs without references—how to understand and talk about non-existent objects. So, like "On Sense and Reference," Russell's "On Denoting" recognizes a problem with the traditional account of language and meaning and seeks to resolve it.

Frege is clear that names, symbols and sentences have references, but he does little to address how this process works at the theoretical level. In pursuing such an account, Russell introduces the concept of a "denoting phrase" which he takes to be similar to any of the following: "a man, some man, any man, every man, all men, the

present King of England, the present King of France, the center of mass of the Solar System at the first instant of the twentieth century, the revolution of the earth round the sun, the revolution of the sun round the earth."²² Initially, this concept of a "denoting phrase" is meant to help describe our ability, from within the general framework provided by Frege, to reference things that we are not acquainted with, but have knowledge about. These things, according to Russell, can only be reached through the use of denoting phrases.²³ However, saying that we come to know things we are not acquainted with through "denoting phrases" is not to say that thinking can proceed without acquaintance. Russell argues that thought proceeds from things we are acquainted with to encompass things we are not acquainted with.²⁴ In short, the foundation of thought is experience.

For Russell, denoting phrases do not have any meaning of their own, but all propositions containing them do.²⁵ In this way, Russell outlines a less atomistic model of meaning by expanding the unit of meaning to sentences as a whole. Further clarifying this model, Russell provides the proposition "I met a man" as an example. In this proposition "a man" is the denoting phrase, and it is clear that while "a man" does not have any particular meaning, the entire statement "I met a man" does. In order to parse this proposition and find the meaning, Russell goes beyond the atomistic model provided by Frege and converts the entire proposition into a quasi-logical structure that explodes the denoting phrase "a man" to match the different implied propositions in the overall

²² Russell, Bertrand. "On Denoting." *Mind*, New Series (Oxford University Press) 114, no. 456 (October 2005), 873.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 874.

²⁵ Ibid.

statement. So, the proposition becomes "'I met x, and x is human' is not always false."²⁶

As is evident, Russell believes, like Frege, that truth is what we are after when we assert a proposition. Russell does not explain his slip into the Fregeian assumption that "truth values" are at the heart of propositions, but it can be assumed this "slip" is in line with the reasoning Frege supplied.

Russell's logical translation provides "a reduction of all propositions in which denoting phrases occur to forms in which no such phrases occur."²⁷ This translation into a set of propositions containing variables that make up denoting phrases comprises a less atomistic account of meaning. This is because Russell explodes the "atoms" of traditional accounts of meaning into a number of entities that do not—taken on their own—share all the qualities "atoms" of meaning traditionally have. Where Frege might say 'a bachelor' has a meaning on its own, Russell explodes such denoting phrases into a number of components and shows that their meaning does not spring fully formed from them, and that meaning relies on bound variables that arise from propositions as a whole. So, meaning comes from a contextual component of denoting phrases. In providing this less atomistic account, Russell helps explain how it is reference "happens" without resorting to a traditionally atomistic model in which words or signs themselves have inherent meanings.

This less atomistic account of reference is obviously more in-depth than the one provided by Frege. However, the true purpose of this account is not so much to explain reference *per se*, but rather, to explain how it is we can refer to things that do not exist in a way consistent with normal referential acts. This explanation leads Russell to conclude

²⁶ Ibid, 875.

²⁷ Ibid, 876.

that, "With our theory of denoting, we are able to hold that there are no unreal individuals; so that the null-class, is the class containing no members, not the class containing as members all unreal individuals."²⁸ This solution is made possible by the fact that instead of terms and propositions pointing directly at their reference as they did with Frege, they serve more as a net and only those things

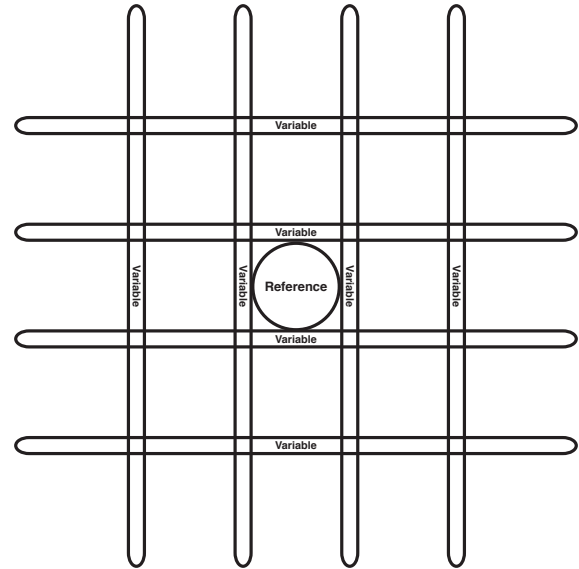


Figure III. Russell's Theory of Meaning

with the constituent properties implied by the denoting phrase(s) in question are caught in it. A graphical interpretation of Russell's theory of meaning can be seen in Figure 3.

Much of what we have said about Frege's vulnerability to Derrida's critiques is sure to carry over to a discussion of Russell's. After all, Russell's theory takes Frege's as a starting point and seeks to resolve a problem within that theory—he does not wish to give the entire theory up. However, in trying to resolve problems within Frege's theory, Russell significantly improves its defenses against Derrida. To start, Russell's introduction of variables, and his use of them in a delimiting fashion with regard to reference introduces the idea of context (granted, still empirical) and conceptual space in the formation of meaning. This is not the sort of context that Derrida speaks of (where meaning is entirely constituted by differences between signs) but it is certainly *contextual*. This switch to a more contextual theory of meaning is due to Russell's focus

²⁸ Ibid, 885.

on reference. In talking about reference, Russell gets away from talking about “meanings” in the sense that Frege does with senses. This is a necessity for the theory to accommodate non-existent referents. In order to account for non-existent referents, Russell abstracts reference, and with it some degree of meaning, to “singular descriptions.” These singular descriptions are still logocentric, in that they still rely on some abstract process of “reference” to create meaning, but with a move from meaning being tied directly to signs to meaning being tied to a variable as part of a set of descriptive phrases, Russell’s theory is less directly logocentric than Frege’s.

As for Derrida’s second critique, of atomism, Russell’s theory is similarly improved. Differences between signs are once again present, and in giving over meaning to a conjunction of signs, Russell provides a less traditionally atomistic theory of meaning. Meaning is not entirely holistic in Russell’s account because he relies on finite singular descriptions (propositions) instead of the entire system of language, so some of Derrida’s critique still applies, but the bite of the critique is much less apparent. This is the sense in which Russell’s account is sub-atomic. It is by no means the equivalent of field theory, because things can still be reduced to specific entities at some level, but it is certainly a move in the right direction, and much more flexible in terms of accommodating the peculiarities of meaning.

Given all of this, it should be no surprise that Russell’s account is significantly less traditional than Frege’s, and in that way it is less dogmatic. In introducing singular descriptions, Russell is able to account for communication without resorting to the quasi-Platonic senses Frege relies upon. In fact, it is quite hard to say what traditional philosophical basis Russell’s theory has. It is simply an attempt to account for non-

existent referents without sacrificing all of Frege's theory of meaning. This makes Russell's theory incredibly *un-dogmatic*. Ultimately, Russell's theory is a pragmatic re-evaluation of previous assumptions in order to arrive at a more nuanced theory of meaning that is better able to account for different problems. To call Russell's theory dogmatic would be to ignore its clear novelty and inventiveness in solving the problem it sets out to solve.

Quine

Further improvements need to be made to our modern account of language and meaning if Derrida's critiques are to be adequately addressed. With our reliance on Platonic conceptions of meaning dispensed with, we still need to fully account for meaning through conceptual spaces and relations—not just empirical context. This will require a fully holistic account. In pursuit of this account, we should continue addressing Russell's non-existent referents through Quine's essay "On What There Is." In "On What There Is," Quine moves away from the more straightforward discussions of meaning provided by Frege and Russell in order to clarify an ontological position that was implied by Russell's "On Denoting." For Quine, the entire issue of non-existent referents revolves around the fact that "...there is gulf between *meaning* and *naming* even in the case of a singular term which *is* genuinely a name of an object."²⁹ The upshot of Russell's singular descriptions is that in endorsing them, "we are convicted of a particular ontological presupposition if, and only if, the alleged presuppositum has to be reckoned among the entities over which our variables range in order to render one of our affirmations true."³⁰

²⁹ Quine, Willard V. "On What There Is." *The Review of Metaphysics* (Philosophy Education Society Inc.) 2, no. 5 (September 1948), 28.

³⁰ Ibid, 32.

Put simply, the only time we can be charged with implicitly believing in the existence of a particular entity is when that entity is required for one of our statements to be true. If I were to say “Pegasus came to visit me last night, and we flew off to the Chucky Cheese to play skee-ball,” you could reasonably charge me with a belief in the existence of Pegasus, Chucky Cheese, skee-ball, and a variety of other things required for that statement to be considered true. You could also reasonably infer that I had an amazing time. However, if I do not make a statement of this sort, there is no way to charge me with a belief in Pegasus etc. This sort of ontological freedom ties into modernism’s goal of theoretical freedom, and ties back to Derrida in that it accommodates the gulf between meaning and naming, and by doing this it is actually more robust and flexible than other theories.

Quine considers Russell’s solution a withdrawal to “the semantical plane” (rather than the more syntactical plane of Frege) and believes that it is useful because it allows us to find common ground without having to agree on the existence of different entities. It is possible for us to find common ground because, “our conceptual schemes converge sufficiently in their intermediate and upper ramifications to enable us to communicate successfully on such topics as politics, weather, and, in particular, language.”³¹ Shifting in this way to addressing issues with the way we use language in communication is necessary if we are going to say anything substantial about meaning. The insight here is that an account of meaning and reference must also effectively account for communication—disagreements and all.

³¹ Ibid, 35.

Everything Quine says about our ability to disagree over existence claims comes down to one question: what sort of ontology should we adopt? This question is not possible without the modern assumption that we are free to choose. For Quine, this is a fairly straightforward issue, and one that is not particularly unique to this situation. Quine believes that accepting an ontology is "...similar in principle to our acceptance of a scientific theory... we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged."³² This leads Quine to an interesting conclusion: our beliefs are essentially convenient myths—at least from the perspective of those who do not believe them. Our beliefs are not true in any ultimate sense, but contain some amount of truth.³³ This conclusion comes hand in hand with another: the quality of a myth is relative to our epistemology, and a given epistemology is one among many that correspond to our various enterprises.³⁴ Through these conclusions we can see that, for Quine, meaning is dependent upon our ontological and epistemological approach, and we are free to choose those approaches.

Given the fact that Quine's "On What There Is" simply expands on the ontological implications of Russell's singular descriptions, we might be tempted to say that there's nothing radically new in Quine's account of meaning at this stage. However, there is most definitely something new, and that something new is implied by Quine's statements about choosing ontologies. This "newness" is the importance of seeing theories as pragmatic attempts to find answers to existing questions, and seeing theories

³² Ibid, 35-36.

³³ Ibid, 37.

³⁴ Ibid, 38.

as tied to a particular epistemological and ontological outlook. While Quine does not introduce anything radically new as far as a theory of meaning goes at this stage, he does introduce some principles that help us *judge* different theories of meaning. So, before moving on to Quine's theoretical contribution to our discussion of meaning, we should take a minute to see how the preceding theories stack up.

Starting with Derrida it is clear to see that his theory of meaning is simple. However, some difficulties arise when we look at the pragmatic achievements of "Différance." Obviously, Derrida wants to provide a theory that can account for meaning through context in the conceptual space sense without resorting to logocentrism, and his concept of "différance" is built in order to do that. Derrida also wants to use "différance" to move away from atomistic accounts because they cannot account for the gap between signifiers and signifieds, and insist on meanings existing somewhere "out there." This "out there-ness" of meaning inevitably ties back to a dogmatic pursuit of meaning and Derrida wants to use "différance" to strike out in a new, non-dogmatic direction. All three goals are legitimate responses to the failures of past theories of meaning. It is their execution in "différance" that makes them problematic. In choosing to limit his theory of meaning to signs, and the differences between those signs, Derrida cuts himself off from a variety of answers Frege and Russell have recourse to in their more logocentric, atomistic and dogmatic accounts.

For example, Derrida is left without an explicit way to account for equality statements. When Frege says " $a = b$," we can describe what is going on because we have empirically based referents as a foundation. Derrida, in his admirable attempt to avoid atomism and dogmatism avoids giving "différance" a foundation like this, and throws

language into an indeterminate state. It is clear that without a tangible foundation, “différance” is also going to struggle to explain communication. Likewise, Derrida can’t account for non-existent referents and our disagreements about them. He avoids Russell’s semi-atomism, but leaves himself without obvious recourse to Russell’s solution.

On the flipside, we can see how Frege’s and Russell’s accounts are vulnerable to Derrida’s critiques, but they also seem to have a significant amount of explanatory power. In Quine’s terms, they do a surprisingly good job of fitting the disordered fragments of experience into their theoretical spaces. We could, if we wanted, go so far as to contend that all logocentric, atomistic, or dogmatic accounts of language and meaning are necessarily wrong, and we’d still be left with practical benefits of endorsing Frege’s and Russell’s accounts. Further, if these really are just supposed to be convenient myths we take to be true, what’s the harm in endorsing one we know to be wrong assuming it helps us? The question that has to be asked of Derrida is: what do we get from endorsing “différance?” What, exactly, does “différance” do that these “incorrect” theories don’t? Is there a benefit to “différance” other than being more “accurate?” This line of questioning should be carried out if we are ever expected to endorse “différance” wholeheartedly on its own, and not simply as a critique. However, in the meantime, it seems Quine has provided us with a better idea as to what a theory of meaning immune to Derrida’s critique ought to look like: it ought to be free of logocentrism, holistic, thoroughly undogmatic, *and* it ought to be able to account for the disordered fragments of experience (including communication) through a reliance on practical foundations. This is almost exactly the sort of account Quine provides in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.”

Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" is an attempt to solve two of the most important issues within empiricism. These issues significantly influence the way in which we view meaning, language, and the "truth" it contains. The first issue (or dogma) Quine attacks is the analytic/synthetic distinction—a distinction he traces back through Kant, Hume, and finally Leibniz. Asserting that there is a distinction between analytic and synthetic statements means believing that there is a difference between statements that are true by virtue of meanings (analytic) and statements that are true by virtue of fact (synthetic).³⁵ The other dogma Quine tackles is reductionism: a position, popularized by the logical positivists, that all meaningful statements can be translated into either tautologies or into statements that refer to immediate experience.³⁶ In discussing Quine's solutions to these issues, we arrive at a theory of language and meaning that can be seen as the fruit of the Fregeian and Russellian branch of analytic philosophy of language we have been discussing. We'll start with the analytic/synthetic distinction.

Quine starts his analysis of analyticity with what might appear to be its most basic definition: analytic statements are those whose denial would be self-contradictory. However, this definition doesn't get us anywhere, according to Quine, because "self-contradictoriness" is a concept that needs to be clarified just as much as "analyticity."³⁷ Another definition that we might attempt is that "...a statement is analytic when it is true by virtue of meanings and independently of fact."³⁸ However, this definition of 'analytic' requires us to talk about some category of things called "meanings" and these are rather

³⁵ Quine, Willard V. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." *The Philosophical Review* (Duke University Press) 60, no. 1 (January 1951), 21.

³⁶ Ibid, 20.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 21.

hard to identify. Quine's pursuit of analyticity in this way is particularly important in relation to Derrida's critiques because in attempting to pin down "meanings," Quine echoes the lessons of the preceding theories: meaning is not naming, nor is it reference.³⁹ In other words, there is a gap between signifiers and signifieds. Without recourse to individual signs and references, we have to look elsewhere for meanings. However, Quine contends that while meanings seem to be ideas (mental, or Platonic) they are elusive, debatable, and ultimately there is little hope we can talk about them in a scientific manner.⁴⁰ So, we would be better off not identifying a specific "meaning" entity.

Without recourse to "self-contradictoriness" or "meanings" to explain analyticity, we are left with the sorts of statements the term 'analytic' is usually applied to. This produces two categories of statements: those that are logically true (no unmarried man is married) and those that are statements about synonyms (no bachelor is married).⁴¹ As should be obvious, "analyticity" in this sense has its base in Frege's "equality." For Quine, the second type of statements, statements about synonyms, leads to issues of "synonymy." Some individuals try to avoid this issue by saying that the second set of statements reduces to the first "by definition." In other words, 'bachelor' is substitutable, by definition, with 'unmarried man.' However this "solution" puts off the issue of "synonymy" onto "definition"⁴² and "definition," except when introducing new notations, rests on prior relationships of synonymy.⁴³ As such, Quine argues that if there are

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 22.

⁴¹ Ibid, 23.

⁴² Ibid, 24.

⁴³ Ibid, 27.

connections that can be made between two terms such that we would call them synonyms, those connections would be grounded in usage.⁴⁴ This interpretation, however, would completely unravel any hope of analyticity. Synonyms would be synonyms by virtue of "fact" and the analytic/synthetic would have no substance to speak of.

Quine attempts a number of other solutions to this issue, but concludes that usage is the only possible basis of synonymy, and that the systemic difference between analytic and synthetic statements simply cannot be drawn. The idea that there is an analytic/synthetic distinction is therefore "an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith."⁴⁵ In this way, Quine ties equality statements directly to usage, and does away with meanings, senses etc. as concrete entities separate from states of affairs. This implies that meaning is not a thing *per se*, and has its basis in context. What sort of context gives rise to meaning can be found in Quine's discussion of reductionism.

Quine believes reductionism is evident in empiricism's reliance on the verification theory of meaning. In other words, the verification theory of meaning is a form of radical reductionism where every statement that isn't a tautology must be a statement about immediate experience, or at least be translated into one, in order for it to be meaningful.⁴⁶ Russell's subatomic account has a lot in common with the verification of meaning in its use of variables to pin down entities with specific properties, but it does not quite hit "radical reduction" in the way the verification theory does. Quine contends that it is impossible to carry out a translation of all statements into statements relating to

⁴⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 36.

immediate experience in principal. This impossibility is avoided, Quine, says, if we stop looking at statements reductively as individuals but instead look at them in terms of their relationship to a whole theory. In Quine's words, "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body."⁴⁷ If this is true, then we are left to conclude that in analyzing statements on their own as Frege and Russell did, they were missing the fact that "meaning" or significance requires an entire theory in order to exist.⁴⁸ In this way, the context that gives rise to meaning is all of science (or whatever theoretical basis has been endorsed), and meaning is a relation between parts of that whole.

It is this conclusion that leads Quine to offer a metaphorical reformulation of the traditional conception of language, meaning, and even "truth" that Frege and Russell aim for. In this vein, Quine argues that "[t]he totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges."⁴⁹ This statement ties into his earlier work in "On What There Is" by realizing that the question of what ontology to choose extends to individual bits of that ontology. This is because each presuppositum is man-made.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 38.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Quine believes that ontologies of this sort gain a measure of durability due to the fact experience is the only thing that can modify them—and even then it is not all-powerful. This is because experience only meets the fabric of our ontology at the edges and that means that the bulk of the fabric is incredibly underdetermined.

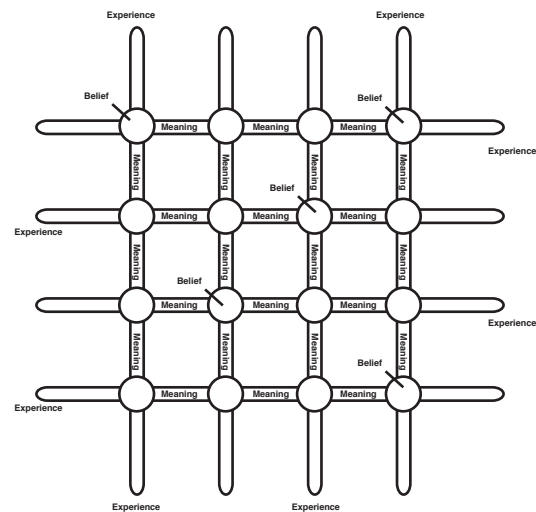


Figure IV. Quine's Thoery of Meaning

This entails that when we are presented with an experience that might challenge our previous assumptions, we have a number of options with regard to explaining that experience and modifying our assumptions.⁵⁰ The assumptions that lie on the edge of the fabric, closest to experience, are likely to be adjusted long before the bulk of the fabric requires adjustment. This implies a sort of theoretical lucidity in determining the structure of our conceptual frameworks. A graphical interpretation of this theory can be seen in Figure 4.

This holistic stance with regard to meaning and truth leads to a few conclusions: conceptual schemes and ontologies are tools, and for an empiricist like Quine, these tools are meant primarily to predict future experience based on past experience. A number of concepts, including "physical objects," "truth," and maybe even "meanings," can be leveraged to do this, but they are leveraged "as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer... in point of epistemological footing the

⁵⁰ Ibid, 39-40.

physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind."⁵¹ As an empiricist, Quine is particularly interested in the concept of physical objects, and contends that the assumption of physical objects is "coeval" with language itself because language is socially constructed and relies on intersubjective statements about physical states of affairs.⁵² In this way, language itself is firmly tied to our scientific endeavors and shown in such a light as to make it the basis (along with empiricism) of all scientific endeavors.

Quine's theory, as implied at the beginning of our discussion of it, is not vulnerable to any of Derrida's three critiques. For one thing, meaning for Quine has to do with the relations between different parts of our conceptual frameworks and their relationship to experience. This is partly due to the fact Quine is wary of any talk of "meanings" as actual entities because he doesn't believe we can pin them down in any concrete way. Quine's theory of meaning is then conceptually spacial in the same sense that Derrida's theory of meaning is conceptually spacial, even if he has recourse to empirical observation. Quine does not focus on an account of how this conceptual space is formed in the way Derrida describes differing and deferring, but it is clear that the differences and relations between different parts of Quine's conceptual frameworks can be represented spacially. A case might be made that Quine's theory is still somewhat logocentric, but whatever logocentrism remains in Quine is present in Derrida as well.

Because meaning for Quine is a relation between a number of things, and not a thing in itself, Quine's theory of meaning is in no way atomistic. Quine's use of experience as the basis of our conceptual frameworks not only decenters the traditional "atoms" of meaning, it emphasizes something Derrida is unable to account for in his

⁵¹ Ibid, 41.

⁵² Ibid, 42.

“play of differences.” Specifically, Quine’s reliance on experience as the foundation of conceptual frameworks emphasizes the role of reason and agency in determining the content of our conceptual frameworks. In a very real way, Quine’s theory places us in a position to create meaning and value through our choices vis-à-vis conceptual frameworks. This is because, as the experiencers, we are directly involved in both experience and our interpretation of it. Derrida does not account for reason and agency in his “différance” because Derrida refuses to give “différance” an empirical foundation for fear of succumbing to logocentrism, atomism, and the metaphysics of presence. In this way, Quine provides a *practical* theoretical freedom Derrida is unable to achieve.

Finally, Quine’s account is not dogmatic. In order to arrive at his theory, Quine goes against two significant dogmas within the modern empirical account, along with a vast tradition of folk-psychological stories about meaning and reference. Through a truly pragmatic pursuit of a theory of meaning, Quine is able to arrive at a novel theory of meaning. Quine’s theory is neither Platonic nor Kantian. It has some similarities to a Kantian account, in that he puts reason at the center of conceptual frameworks, but it is ultimately un-Kantian because there are no categories things *necessarily* fall into—we have the choice to adjust our frameworks however we want, and we choose to “impose” them onto the world.

Quine’s theory also preserves the utility of Frege and Russell’s theories. Equality is still a relation between signs that are presupposed to apply to some “referent,” but this reference no longer proceeds along linear lines (as Frege’s does in tying senses directly to terms). In this way, Quine avoids the problems with Frege’s theory while preserving the importance, and non-triviality, of identity statements in communication and the pursuit of

increased knowledge. Likewise, Quine's theory allows us to explain our disagreements with each other consistently. We need not worry about accidentally ascribing to the existence of things we do not believe exist, and we can coherently explain our disagreements to each other. All of this is possible because Quine avoids the explicit logocentrism, atomism, and dogmatism of previous theories of language and meaning. Derrida's "différance" does this too, but where Quine is able to preserve the pragmatic benefits of these "inaccurate" theories through a reliance on the practical foundation of experience, Derrida is not.

Throughout this discussion we have left out one important fact: Derrida's "Différance" comes after the analytic accounts. At the time Derrida is writing "Différance," Quine's theory of meaning already exists. So, while Derrida's critiques are substantial in relation to the modern tradition at one point in time (Frege and Russell), they are ultimately unnecessary at the time they are given. This is because the modern tradition had already produced a theory capable of not only meeting (and in many ways agreeing with) Derrida's critiques, it was able to produce it without external prompting, and while preserving the practical benefits of past theories.

In explaining Derrida's failure, and the post-modern tradition's failure more generally, to produce a theory of meaning that obviates modern accounts we have recourse to two possibilities. For one, it could be that the Derrida and the post moderns failed to see the modern tradition as it is (a constant interrogation of *all* of tradition in pursuit of progress) and instead confused it with incidental aspects of its existence like positivism or scientism. Put differently, Derrida could have misread the modern tradition's goals. Another option is that Derrida mistakenly believed that the modern

tradition's foundations (like empiricism) were unreliable or burdensome, and that we needed to distance ourselves from them. However, while this concern is somewhat more understandable than a misinterpretation of modernism's goals, it is no less mistaken when presented in the context of "Derrida's motivations in 'Différance.'" Derrida's critique does nothing to challenge the foundations of modernism seen as it actually is (other than abandon them), and without a significant challenge to those foundations, any belief that those foundations are unreliable or limiting is dogmatic. Either way, we can see how Derrida's "Différance" is a mistake, or false start.

CHAPTER III

THE WAY FORWARD

So far we have discussed how Derrida's critique of modern accounts of language and meaning was unnecessary. In the course of doing so, we followed the development of one branch of the analytic account of language and meaning. However, Quine's account is in no ways the end of philosophy of language in the analytic tradition. Quine's account still leaves us talking about "conceptual frameworks" and a whole host of other things that we need to clarify. By following a contemporary offshoot of Quine's semantic holism, we begin to see how modernism can proceed in such a way as to clarify any lingering concepts that have gone without explanation, and how modern philosophy can even more thoroughly rebut the arguments of post-modernists such as Derrida that argue modernism is logocentric, atomistic, and dogmatic. In doing so, we will arrive at a theory of meaning that brings the analytic and continental branches of modern philosophy closer together.

Epistemology Naturalized

Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized" is an obvious continuation and expansion of his work on semantic holism. In it, Quine argues for a view of epistemology that is coextensive with science. For Quine, epistemology is already intricately linked with science in two modes: doctrinal inquiries, in which we are concerned with truth; and conceptual inquiries, in which we are concerned with meaning.⁵³ As one might guess from his "convenient myths" comment in "On What There Is," Quine does not believe

⁵³ Quine, Willard V. "Epistemology Naturalized." In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 69.

that we have gotten anywhere on the doctrinal side of empirical science.⁵⁴ We are not, according to Quine, in the business of divining universal laws. Instead, we are in the business of synthesizing convenient myths for practical purposes. On this more conceptual side, there has been a significant amount of progress.

The conceptual side of epistemology is left to work with two "cardinal tenets" of empiricism. The first of these is the belief that all evidence for science is sensory evidence. The second tenet is a belief that meaning ultimately rests on sensory evidence.⁵⁵ These tenets assert a link between science, meaning and sensory evidence, but sensory evidence does not, strictly speaking, translate into objective science or meaning. So, instead of deriving the laws of nature from sense experience, we are tasked with trying to understand the link between our observations and our conceptual frameworks (science). In pursuit of this understanding, Quine argues we should use all the resources available to us—even the conceptual frameworks whose link we wish to understand.⁵⁶ This means using scientific inquiry to help us understand the foundations of science itself. Psychology is then an important field of study because it can be used to investigate how science comes to be (how our observations become conceptual frameworks) without resorting to doctrinal fabrications.⁵⁷

When we look at the issue of an epistemology dealing with meanings and links to sense experience from a psychological perspective, we can see that "[t]he sort of meaning that is basic to translation, and to the learning of one's own language, is necessarily

⁵⁴ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 75.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 76.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 78.

empirical meaning and nothing more."⁵⁸ This is shown through psychological observation of how children learn their first words. Through such observation, we can see that a child learns the meanings of words by those words being used in close proximity to certain external stimuli shared by both the child and a speaker. In this way, "[l]anguage is socially inculcated and controlled."⁵⁹ With this sort of account in mind, we are able to say that epistemology—how we know what we know—is part and parcel with psychology and natural science itself.⁶⁰ There is no separating science from epistemology without resorting to broad, unjustified fabrications.

One of the benefits of this more scientific, foundational account of epistemology is that in putting sensory input at the foundations of language and meaning, post-modern claims about the indeterminacy of language lose some of their power. Language is still indeterminate and terms are still dependent on the overall system, but meaning is not entirely undecidable.⁶¹ In addition, the "analytic" statements Quine tackled in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" finally have something resembling a definition: they are true by virtue of all fluent speakers in a language community subscribing to them.⁶² In this way, analyticity is truth via "systematic" agreement. Put differently, analyticity is an intersubjective phenomenon in which all speakers of a given language agree by virtue of their sharing the same language and understanding its rules. A synthetic statement is then one in which all speakers of the language "...give the same verdict when given the same

⁵⁸ Ibid, 81.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 82.

⁶¹ Ibid, 84.

⁶² Ibid, 86.

concurrent stimulation."⁶³ This ties into Quine's earlier semantic holism in that these sentences cease to have any "meaning" on their own—they derive what meaning they have from belonging to a system of language and its empirical context.⁶⁴ Science itself is still largely underdetermined. However, like Quine's semantic holism and even Derrida's "différance," this account is still slightly logocentric in its reliance on "systems" and "conceptual frameworks."

Brains, Brains, the Meaningful Fruit

Luckily, with epistemology tied to science, we presumably have recourse to a wide variety of empirical sciences to help us further develop a more nuanced account of language and meaning. The most promising of these sciences is contemporary neuroscience. At the very least, neuroscience allows us to carry on developing this same line of thinking with the aid of biological study. At its best, neuroscience allows us to speak of language and meaning in sublinguistic terms, which allows us to get a bit more distance from logocentric accounts. However, such a neuroscientific account requires a bit of background. Paul Churchland's "Catching Consciousness in a Recurrent Net" is a good place to start.

Philosophy of the sort that Churchland pursues has its roots in the analytic tradition outlined above. However, it diverges from the more logical/linguistic accounts provided by Frege, Russell and to some extent Quine. This divergence follows along the lines of U.T. Place's "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?" which argues for the possibility of a physicalistic account of consciousness. Such an account would allow us to link our sense experiences to science in a more thoroughly scientific way than is available if we

⁶³ Ibid, 86-87.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 89.

pursue dualist or idealist accounts of consciousness. Churchland is an optimist when it comes to this sort of account. Churchland disagrees with Dan Dennett, who seeks a neuroscientific account of meaning along slightly different lines. Namely, Dennett argues that brains are similar to “virtual” von Neumann machines running the “software” of consciousness, where Churchland argues that consciousness is a result of the brain’s hardware—not just made possible by the brains hardware. Regardless, Churchland claims he and Dennett are both “closet Hegelians.”⁶⁵ This closet Hegelianism lies in their belief that the conceptual activity of philosophy and science “involves an endless contest between an evergreen variety of conceptual alternatives; and it displays, at least occasionally, a welcome progress in our conceptual sophistication, and in the social and technological practices that structure our lives.”⁶⁶ This Hegelian optimism meshes well with what we have already said about the modern tradition and its pursuit of progress.

Ultimately, Churchland's neuroscientific account rests on the idea that consciousness is the result of certain physical structures in the brain, and its activity.⁶⁷ This is important because “consciousness”—in the broad sense of “mental activity”—is presumably where the bulk of the language and meaning “work” is done. So, if we're going to further our account of language and meaning, we must turn to a study of the brain. Churchland's optimism, and his belief in a Quineian scientific epistemology leads him to say that “a proper account of human scientific knowledge must somehow be a proper part of a general theory of biological systems and biological development” and

⁶⁵ Churchland, Paul. “Catching Consciousness in a Recurrent Net.” In *Neurophilosophy at Work*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 2.

this necessitates looking to the brain for language and meaning.⁶⁸ Such an account of language and meaning in the brain requires painting a picture in which an individual's understanding of the world consists in the arrangement of their brain's roughly 10^{14} acquired synaptic connections.⁶⁹

Neurosemantics

With the broad outlines of the sort of account Churchland pursues in view, we can turn to Churchland's account of language and meaning via neurologically based "state space semantics." Churchland introduces this account in part to address the problem of translation in Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized." It is unclear, particularly in Quine's account, how we ought to go about "mapping the lexicon of one language onto the lexicon of another, or the concepts of one person's conceptual framework onto the concepts of another's" in a way that preserves "sense, meaning, [and] semantic identity across the pairings effected by such a mapping."⁷⁰ This mapping issue boils down to an ontological question about what meaning and concepts are. We have to get clear on "meaning" and "concepts" before we can talk meaningfully about language. Churchland attempts to provide an internalist account of meaning in order to avoid criticisms of past empirical accounts.⁷¹

Churchland pursues his internalist account with finding a solution to two issues that we encountered earlier in Frege's and Quine's work, the issues of "identity of meaning" and "similarity of meaning," in mind. Individuals such as Jerry Fodor and

⁶⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 7.

⁷⁰ Churchland, Paul. "Neurosemantics." In *Neurophilosophy at Work*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 126.

⁷¹ Ibid, 126-127.

Ernest Lepore provide accounts of these issues more in line—at least in some ways—with these more "traditional" logocentric accounts. However, in pursuing a physical internalist account of these issues, Churchland abandons most of the content of these accounts.⁷² In doing so, he presents a theory of meaning in which "meaning" is reduced to particular neuronal relationships (activation patterns) in the brain. According to Churchland, these relationships can be mapped out into "state spaces" comprised of "prototype points" and viewed as geometrical solids (or hyper-solids as the case may be). The "prototype points" in this geometric metaphor are the vertexes of the geometrical solids, and are, in reality, the neurons themselves.

The problem with this account is that it's hard to tie prototype points to specific "things" without resorting to empirical observation. Without empirical observation, we seem to lose out on a fundamental part of "translation." As Quine said, if two things are said to be synonymous, that synonymy must be grounded in usage. However, with an internalist account, we are cut off from any recourse to usage (similar, in fact, to the way Derrida is cut off from usage with "différance"), and seem to lose our ability to compare prototype points between individuals. Churchland is not fazed by this difficulty.

Churchland argues "...such direct causal/semantical identifications of the prototype points are wholly unnecessary to the business of mapping the conceptual structure of one network onto the conceptual structure of another, and equally unnecessary to measuring the degree of similarity that, failing perfect identity, each structure bears to the other."⁷³ In other words, if we have each map of prototype points, we can compare them to each

⁷² Ibid, 127.

⁷³ Ibid, 129.

other without necessarily knowing the empirical "content" of the maps because, in a Quineian way, they only lay across reality as a whole.

In addition, if two individuals have the same concept, the concept's prototype points will presumably map out in a metrically identical manner—or something close to it.⁷⁴ When dealing with these mappings, their multi-dimensional nature allows us to manipulate them (rotate, flip etc.) in order to find at least one way in which they line up. When this is accomplished, Churchland claims we know that the two sets of prototype points are semantically identical.⁷⁵ If they are not metrically identical, we can measure any differences between them in order to discuss issues of similarity. In this way, we have an internalist account of identity and similarity of meaning that does not require us to know the content of the concepts in question.

The downside of this account is that we are stuck with talking about "narrow content." We can say that two concepts are identical between users, but we can't say much about them—that would require an empirical account of their usage. While this account does not allow us to definitively decide everything content-wise, it does allow us to say quite a bit more about the sort of existence concepts and meanings have. Quine, we will remember, despaired of ever finding "meanings" and this account seems to have found them—and not in an atomistic manner that Derrida could critique.

Churchland addresses a number of criticisms of this account, primarily from Fodor and Lepore. For Churchland, Fodor and Lepore's rejection of neuronal accounts is due to "a tension that has been with us at least since Frege. It centers on the contrast between meaning as reference, extension, or denotation versus meaning as sense,

⁷⁴ Ibid, 130.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 132.

intension, or connotation."⁷⁶ People like Fodor and Lepore take Frege and Russell's side in emphasizing meaning as reference or denotation and a more logocentric account. Churchland, on the other hand, focuses on "sense" which is more in line with Quine's comments about conceptual frameworks in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" and semantic holism itself.

This difference in emphasis has a lot to do with the fact that unlike Fodor and Lepore, Churchland considers the content of a concept a "highly peculiar" portrayal of some aspect of the world.⁷⁷ This is in opposition to Fodor and Lepore's accounts according to which concepts have an essentially law-like relationship to the external world. For Fodor and Lepore, it is odd that anyone would ever misunderstand anyone else because we all share the same law-like connections to external stimuli. Churchland, however, believes it is our lack of law-like connections, and our reliance on rough "portrayals" that defines meaning. For Churchland, it is somewhat amazing that we ever understand anyone else because we all have slightly different portrayals of the world. In discussing how these different portrayals come to be, Churchland returns to a more science-based account.

Churchland argues that neuronal relations are earned the "hard way" through years of learning that ultimately lead to a fairly stable portrayal of the world.⁷⁸ In this way, concepts are tied to the "peculiar cognitive history of each individual, and in the peculiar cognitive history of the society in which that individual was raised."⁷⁹ Not only does this explain how individuals can have different portrayals of the world, it brings one

⁷⁶ Ibid, 134.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 135.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

of the primary concerns of continental philosophy—and post-modernism—society's influence on thought, into play. It also stands on ground similar to Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" and "Epistemology Naturalized." It provides the beginning of a non-logocentric scientific account of human knowledge that maintains the general tone of semantic holism.

Neuronal Holism

This makes the account somewhat hard for semantic atomists like Fodor and Lepore to digest because Churchland's account has little to do with the traditional logocentric way concepts and meanings are treated in philosophy. However, it has a lot to do with the way concepts and meanings are treated by semantic holists.⁸⁰ In this way, the account builds off of and supports a holistic account of meaning with recourse to "empirical neuroscience, the study of the microanatomy and the physiology of terrestrial brains."⁸¹ This is exactly the sort of convergence of science and philosophy Quine calls for in "Epistemology Naturalized." In addition, it supports the holistic account of meaning by describing how it is things are understood as wholes on a biological level and without relying on linguistic entities.

This last bit requires some explication. First, the benefit of using empirical neuroscience in pursuit of meaning and concepts is that it allows us to discuss how meanings come to be. In Churchland's view, prototype-families (the solids and hyper-solids in the geometric metaphor) are "learned" through repeat encounters with the world. This "learning" is the reconfiguration of synaptic matrices.⁸² In short, "[t]he acquisition of

⁸⁰ Ibid, 136.

⁸¹ Ibid, 138.

⁸² Ibid.

concepts, on this view, is thus something that requires the intricate and simultaneous tuning of trillions of synaptic connections – the individual “coefficients” of the relevant matrix.”⁸³ These concepts, with all of their intricacies, cannot be accounted for in any other way. Semantic innateists like Fodor and Lepore are left trying to explain how it is that so much data, so much complexity, could possibly arise as a matter of strict genetics—of simply being human (or any other animal for that matter). Because it is mathematically impossible, according to Churchland, to explain semantic data as a result of genetics, it is impossible to believe that concepts are innate *and* that they consist in the “microconfigurations of our 10^{14} synapses.”⁸⁴ So concepts, on this view, are *necessarily* learned synaptic relations. However, this says little about their being understood holistically.

The holistic connection can be seen in digging deeper into Churchland's account of learning concepts. During the process of learning Churchland believes we do not simply learn *a* thing. Instead, in the process of learning *a* thing a number of other things are learned. Churchland uses an artificial neural network's ability to discriminate faces as an example of how this happens. In order for this neural network to discriminate faces, it must be able to recognize differences in face shape, eye type etc. This information is essential for the neural network to recognize faces.⁸⁵ In this same way, Churchland says, “[h]uman children learn readily to recognize faces, and dolls, and cookies, and socks. But there are no *laws of nature* that comprehend these things qua faces, dolls, cookies, and

⁸³ Ibid, 139.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 139-140.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 142.

socks."⁸⁶ Instead, children recognize these things by accumulating a large amount of information about them, out of which they synthesize (with the help of a speaker) the concept "face" or "doll" etc. An interesting aspect of these concepts that comes out of this "repeat experience and fine tuning" model is that concepts necessarily range over a number of cases.⁸⁷ We might even think of them in a Russellian or Quineian "bound variable" sense. This reading of concepts helps provide an account of how the nonexistent referent issue tackled by Russell in "On Denoting" and Quine in "On What There Is" came to exist in the first place. Essentially: complex concepts can range over "things" that are not found in our ontology, but whose *meaning* we can understand via experience with entities that do exist in our ontology. This issue trips up meaning atomists in part because strictly referential accounts of meaning can't account for how those complex concepts can exist without a direct causal relation.

Churchland's account also bears some resemblance to Quine's metaphorical statements about the "edges" of our conceptual frameworks making contact with experience and being subject to change, but their bodies being relatively stable. In this sense, our prototype points may change due to new experiences, but their overall shape—their relationship to each other—stays mostly the same. In Churchland's words: "a broad sample of imperfect approximations is adequate to project a smooth metric that will capture all cases – the marginal, the prototypical, and even the hyperbolic cases."⁸⁸ In this sense, concepts are networks that delimit the range of possible images of a certain sort. Having a given concept is to "*command* that well-informed range of possible

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 144.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 145.

representations.⁸⁹ This, along with other developmental concerns leads Churchland to say that we perceive things as "holons" not atoms.⁹⁰

Language

So far we have been talking about what Churchland's account entails for "meaning" and "concepts" and "conceptual frameworks" overall. However, the most interesting thing that this account opens up is a new view of language. For Churchland, when we understand meaning and concepts as existing in the brain as neuronal relations, and as developed over time in the presence of certain stimuli, we can see that language is an acquired skill. Language is acquired in the sense that it is learned along the same lines Quine outlines in "Epistemology Naturalized" when he says that language is socially inculcated and controlled. What this language skill allows for is the perception and manipulation of others' brain states, and for others to perceive and manipulate our brain states in return.⁹¹ According to Churchland, this ability unites us all cognitively in a way that no other species is united, and entails that our cognition can be a "*collective* activity, on a minute-by-minute and even a second-by-second basis."⁹²

Ultimately, this view of language gives rise to an overarching theory of language, communication and even thought itself. This is because, "[o]ver generations, the evolving *form* of that manipulative skill would itself come to embody useful general information, information transmittable from generation to generation as the skill itself gets passed down."⁹³ And herein lies a bit of a Hegelian treat. At its foundation, Churchland's account

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 150.

⁹¹ Ibid, 159.

⁹² Ibid, 160.

⁹³ Ibid, 160.

holds out for the sort of progress that Hegel and all moderns seek to some extent, and asserts such progress is made possible by language. Unlike Derrida, who makes language indeterminate and hard to manage in order to avoid foundations, Churchland puts language at the foundation of human knowledge and the possibility for truth—even if it's not doctrinal truth. This account, in other words, pushes forward the modern conception of language and meaning by providing an even more nuanced, less logocentric account than that provided by the branch of analytic philosophy of language we discussed earlier. This account also has a funny way of bringing the analytic tradition it grew out of closer to the continental tradition. This is by virtue of this account's surprising similarity, specifically in its treatment of language as a communal activity that unites us, to Habermas' concept of "communicative reason."

Habermas and Modern Reunification

It is safe to say that for all of our discussion of modernity and the analytic tradition, Habermas has said quite a bit more about modernity and its continental branch. Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* in particular provides a mountain of material to digest, but we will focus, having already sketched our own path of modernity, on Habermas' concept of "communicative reason." Communicative reason can be seen as the continental branch's equivalent of Quine's, and ultimately Churchland's, comments about language and its role in human reason. This can be seen in the fact that they both end up arguing for language as a medium by which we can communicate (and come to agreement on) a variety of different things despite having our own peculiar societal and cognitive histories.

Habermas argues that the post-moderns make a mistake in pursuing anti-foundationalist goals. This mistake is due to their ignoring "the philosophical counterdiscourse which, from the start, accompanied the philosophical discourse of modernity initiated by Kant, already drew up a counterreckoning for subjectivity as the principle of modernity."⁹⁴ In other words, the modern discourse already contains within it the ability to deal with the issue of subjectivity, and the post-moderns ignore this ability. In this way, the post-moderns misidentify subjectivity as the primary principle of modernity, when in fact it is incidental to the tradition as a whole. This general line of argument was repeated earlier in our discussion of Derrida's account of language and meaning in comparison to the analytic account that actually came before it. The road to post-modernity that Habermas traces from Hegel, Marx, Heidegger and on to Derrida is then riddled with opportunities to take a different road, but at every point this opportunity is refused by the post-moderns and proto-post-moderns.

This alternative route lies in what Habermas calls "communicative reason." This route means giving up Heidegger and Derrida's "sentimental presupposition of metaphysical homelessness"—their anti-foundationalism—and seeing it as "a symptom of exhaustion."⁹⁵ This exhaustion is due to Heidegger and Derrida's repeated attempts to make sense of the relationship between the transcendental and empirical modes—how we can go from contingent statements about the here and now to "law-like" statements about the world. Using the road analogy, the post-moderns take a detour from modernity because they are convinced the road is dangerous and unsupported, but the detour is

⁹⁴ Habermas, Jürgen. "An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject." In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 296.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

unnecessary (as we saw with relation to language and meaning), and it leaves them tired, without an obvious way back to the main road, and no way of moving forward.

According to Habermas, this detour could have been avoided if the post-moderns had understood that through coming to mutual understanding—through using language to communicate—we are able to overcome the apparent gap between transcendental (*a priori*) and empirical (*a posteriori*) truth. This is exactly the sort of thing Frege was saying when he said that making a statement presupposes objectivity—multiple speakers come together and use the same terms and are able to communicate effectively. Quine also supports this position. Subjective interpretation is bridged through the use of “objective” language. Habermas goes further to say that “[w]hoever has been trained in this system [of language] has learned how, in the performative attitude, to take up and to transform into one another the perspectives of the first, second, and third persons.”⁹⁶ This same ability is at work in Churchland's account: we learn to manipulate the brain states of others, and receive their manipulations through intersubjective language and the “truth” of that system. We can go from our particular conceptual framework to a “universal” language and back to another's particular conceptual framework at will.

When we speak of language in this way—as bridging the gap between subjectivity through an “objective” or “common” system—and we cease talking about some separate realm of truths beyond empirical observation “the ontological separation between the transcendental and the empirical is no longer applicable.”⁹⁷ So long as speakers are able to achieve understanding—find common ground—they operate within the “horizon of their common lifeworld” and this is an intuitively known holistic

⁹⁶ Ibid, 296-297.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 298.

background. Similar to Churchland's account, Habermas' account of language and meaning puts an emphasis on the society an individual is raised in, and the methods by which they have been taught to communicate.⁹⁸ These methods and “backgrounds” are internalized by the individual and incorporated as part of their “lifeworld.” Relating back to Churchland, we might say that these methods are similar to a key that accompanies our internal conceptual maps. This key helps us translate and communicate the content of our internal maps with others. Through this mediating aspect of language (the key to our conceptual maps), “the purism of pure reason is not resurrected again in communicative reason.”⁹⁹

Not only does Habermas argue for communicative reason as the road post-modernity should have taken, he argues that attacking subject-centered reason—the goal of the post-modern detour on his reading—is only possible from within modernity to begin with. By moving beyond modernity, and attempting to move beyond paradigms in general, the post-moderns cut themselves off from the solution to their problems, and lock themselves into a reliance on subject-centered reason.¹⁰⁰ This is because you cannot simply call for the end of something like subject-centered reason and then move on—one paradigm must be replaced by another, and modernism is the only tradition able to contain the paradigm of communicative reason.¹⁰¹ Through viewing it in this way, Derrida’s “Différance” and the post-modern tradition it belongs to can, at most, be considered a critique of modernity's logocentrism—not a critique of modernity as a whole. Churchland's account, in reducing truth and meaning to non-linguistic entities in

⁹⁸ Ibid, 299.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 301.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 309.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 310.

the brain achieves the same result as far as critiquing modern logocentrism, and Habermas' communicative reason can be seen as the praxis side of Churchland's account. The two accounts are not the same, but they are complementary.

Despite the differences in focus between philosophy in the analytic and continental traditions (science and politics respectively), then, the two traditions come together in defense of modernity in a compelling manner through a redefinition of language, meaning, and their respective roles in pursuit of knowledge. However, it is important to note what is likely clear to every philosopher reading this: the branch of the analytic tradition sketched out here is in no way entirely representative of the variety of positions contained in the tradition, nor is Habermas entirely representative of everything going on in continental philosophy. However, if we are going to take the post-modern movement seriously, address its concerns, and move on, these two modern accounts of language and meaning are the best options we have.

CHAPTER IV

THE MODERN NIETZSCHE

The question remains *why*, if alternative conceptual routes were available to them, the post-moderns avoided them. Why did Derrida present an unnecessary theory of meaning, and if we side with Habermas, why was post-modernism itself ultimately a mistake, or a false-start? The answer to this question can be seen in post-modernism's roots. Specifically, the post-modern tradition relies on an incorrect interpretation of Nietzsche, and this interpretation causes them to miss the alternative conceptual routes open to them. Post-moderns do not see Nietzsche as the modern he is, in part due to a misreading of the modern tradition's goals and in part due to a misreading of Nietzsche himself. However, this misinterpretation of Nietzsche has gone unquestioned within post-modernism thanks in part to Deleuze's repetition and expansion of it. Even Habermas, who we just turned to for support in arguing for modernity, supports this incorrect interpretation. In his discussion of Nietzsche's role in the birth of post-modernism, Habermas seems to support a view that the post-moderns were at least partially right to use Nietzsche. In this sense, Habermas contends that Nietzsche was a post-modern precursor. However, this is not actually the case. In showing how this is not the case, we will start with Habermas' account of Nietzsche's philosophical ties to post-modernity and see if we can't cut them. Following that, we will turn to a direct discussion of Nietzsche. Through this direct discussion, we will see how Nietzsche was in fact a modern and not only did the post-moderns misinterpret him, Nietzsche would never support the post-modern position.

On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life

According to Habermas, Nietzsche can be seen as responding to Kant's idea of "enlightenment." Habermas says that Kant's "enlightenment" entails that it is impossible to reverse the learning process, and that insights gained through enlightenment cannot simply be forgotten. This means that enlightenment, and with it the modern tradition (if our earlier reading of Kant is accurate), can only proceed and address its deficits by "radicalized enlightenment."¹⁰² In this way, the only solution to the modern tradition's problems is more modernism. At the time Nietzsche was writing this manifested as an ever-growing interest in history and a desire for more and more knowledge, without a specific goal in mind. Nietzsche, to be fair to Habermas, was most certainly against this culture of historicism and its gluttonous pursuit of knowledge. Habermas quotes Nietzsche's "On The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" to demonstrate this: "Knowledge, taken in excess without hunger, even contrary to need, no longer acts as a transforming motive impelling to action and remains hidden in a certain chaotic inner world ... and so the whole of modern culture is essentially internal... a 'Handbook of Inner Culture for External Barbarians.'"¹⁰³ In this sense, Nietzsche argues that an overabundance of historical knowledge is a bad thing, and that it prevents us from moving forward. However, this is not the attack on "modernity" that Habermas makes it out to be. This is because Habermas mistakes Nietzsche's "modern culture" for "modernity" and fails to see that in advocating that we avoid obsessing about the past, Nietzsche's is striking out against tradition in a very modern way. Habermas identifies

¹⁰² Habermas, Jürgen. "The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point." In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 84.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 85.

the historicism and relentless pursuit of “knowledge” of Nietzsche’s contemporaries with the modern tradition, when in fact the modern tradition, as we have defined it, strikes out against this sort of historicism and “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” in order to preserve theoretical freedom in much the same way Nietzsche does.

In order to see this fact, we must distinguish between Nietzsche's use of the term ‘modern’ and what we have been calling the modern tradition. Nietzsche uses the term ‘modern’ in a way we don’t use it when discussing the modern tradition. Namely, he uses it in something closer to its original sense of "new" or "recent." So, Nietzsche is not speaking of the modern tradition when he says "modern culture," he is speaking of contemporary culture at the time he is writing. This culture, Nietzsche feels, is destroying itself through a relentless pursuit of history. This is destructive, Nietzsche believes, because an overabundance of history leads to a sort of nihilism. Too much history causes things to lose their meaning, their weight etc., and further, we lose our motivation to move forward, to strike out in pursuit of something new. In the same essay, Nietzsche says, "a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centered to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end."¹⁰⁴ This horizon is a limit on knowledge, and functions like an atmosphere that allows us to breathe. In this way, drawing horizons is a foundational move: it gives us a basis to work from, and provides a theoretical springboard toward the future. More explicitly, there must be an end to our pursuit of history—always looking backward

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." In *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, translated by R.J. Hollingdale. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63.

without an eye on the future paralyzes us. But this is not to say that history is a bad thing. Rather, "the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture."¹⁰⁵ An individual able to balance these two things would be Nietzsche's "historical man" who uses history in pursuit of life. The scholars of his day are then "suprahistorical" and see nothing in the future that is not already in the past. This is an outlook that Nietzsche says causes nausea.¹⁰⁶ It is a sickness. In this way, Nietzsche is not arguing against increased knowledge and the modern tradition, he is arguing against pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake without limit. Perhaps if we could construe Kant's enlightenment as arguing for pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake we could say that Nietzsche is anti-modern in the sense Habermas contends, but this would do a disservice to Kant.

When it comes to Nietzsche's critiques of the scholars of his day, the critique still stands. However, the critique is not directed at philosophy or history in the modern tradition. In fact, if we were to accuse anyone of this sort of limitlessness today, it would have to be post-modernists—at least on Habermas' reading. Their relentless pursuit of foundations, and their ultimate decision that there are none is a clear failure to "draw a horizon." Their pessimism mirrors the pessimism Nietzsche ascribes to the suprahistorical man in tone and general cause (lack of foundations). By getting caught up in this endless pursuit of past origins, the post-moderns cut themselves off from progress. Quine and Churchland, on the other hand, very clearly draw a horizon. Quine's semantic holism even uses a metaphor compatible with this idea of a "horizon within which we are able to live." This is the "conceptual fabric" metaphor in which knowledge and science

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 66.

only impinge on the world around its edges. Experience is the horizon Quine and Churchland draw in order to move forward, and empirical science is the atmosphere they breathe.

Back to Habermas. Habermas says that Nietzsche, when faced with this historical aspect of "modern culture" was forced to either present an imminent critique, or give up the program entirely. Because Habermas fails to understand Nietzsche's emphasis on balancing history with the unhistorical, he believes Nietzsche chose the latter option and abandoned the dialectic of enlightenment.¹⁰⁷ But if we read Nietzsche correctly, we can see what his actual contention is: the dialectic of enlightenment (if we want to call it that) cannot proceed on only one term. There must be an "other" to history—we cannot let our pursuit of history dissolve the future. But likewise, we cannot proceed into the future without the past as a starting point. Pursuing one without the other is doomed to failure.

To be sure, Nietzsche does say, as Habermas cites, "history *must* itself dissolve the problem of history, knowledge *must* turn its sting against itself — this... is the imperative of the new spirit of the 'new age' if it really does contain something new, mighty, original and a promise of life."¹⁰⁸ However, this is not evidence of Nietzsche calling for a sort of post-modern dissolution of history and knowledge, it is, rather, evidence of Nietzsche calling for a critique of these pursuits from *within* them. This is the sort of critique provided by Frege, Russell, Quine, and especially Churchland. Quine and Churchland in particular take on assumptions within philosophy and science and do away with them using the tools of philosophy and science. Further, Quine's embracing myth addresses Nietzsche's concern that we have lost a sense of myth as a requirement for life,

¹⁰⁷ Habermas, Jürgen. "Nietzsche as a Turning Point," 85-86.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 86.

while also drawing limits on what science can and cannot do. Derrida, on the other hand, in his wish to extract himself from the objective pursuit of history or knowledge, loses his ability to critique the pursuits from within and fails to move forward along the Habermasian lines already outlined.

The Birth of Tragedy

The rest of Habermas' interpretation of Nietzsche relies on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. While we will not address specific claims of Habermas' about *The Birth of Tragedy* and Nietzsche's positions in it, we should take a moment to see what all the fuss is about. If Habermas is right, it is Nietzsche's apparent role as an "acolyte" of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy* that ultimately leads him to fight against the modern tradition. At the outset, it may seem reasonable that *The Birth of Tragedy* is an anti-modern work because Nietzsche truly does advocate for the Dionysian perspective at a number of points in *TBoT*, and Habermas correctly interprets this Dionysian perspective as irrational. In his retrospective preface, Nietzsche even says that in *TBoT*, he recognized for the first time that science (and rationality) itself was something problematic and questionable.¹⁰⁹ However, taken on its own, this statement says nothing about the modern tradition, and even less about science as a whole. Once again, Nietzsche is attacking *science* as it existed at the time of his writing—ensconced in dogmas and a belief that it could divine the laws of nature. Further, this is not the point, strictly speaking, of *The Birth of Tragedy*.

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "The Birth of Tragedy." In *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Guess and Ronald Spiers, translated by Ronald Spiers. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4-5.

To start, Nietzsche is primarily concerned with explaining the birth of "tragedy." Tragedy, in this case, refers to the Greek tragedies and tragic art as a whole. For Nietzsche, tragedy has two sides: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The former gets its name from Apollo, and has connotations of light, images and dreams. The latter gets its name from Dionysus, and has connotations of darkness and intoxication. In tragedy, these two aspects are joined as one.¹¹⁰ Tragedy is then seen as a necessary development to cover over the Dionysian meaninglessness of existence with Apollonian illusions.¹¹¹ For Nietzsche, Dionysian reality is too much for people to handle. It paralyzes us, and makes us see any action as ultimately meaningless.¹¹² It is the Apollonian drive to images and illusion that saves us from this abyss. It is the interplay between these two aspects of tragedy (Apollonian and Dionysian) that make tragedy the perfect art form in Nietzsche's eyes. Each aspect taken on its own is insufficient to justify and cultivate life, but together they are able to elevate life itself to an art form.

If there is a tone in which Nietzsche comes across as an acolyte of Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is in his arguing that through our pursuit of science we have lost the Dionysian aspect of life. For Nietzsche, Socrates and his followers became so focused on their images that they forgot the underlying structure of reality—they lost sight of the fact that their theories were illusions.¹¹³ However, Nietzsche does not ultimately argue for Dionysus, he argues for tragedy. This is not a case of an acolyte making a case for his god, it is a case of a skeptic calling for a return to a balanced view of the world, and a more *nuanced* view of the world. Socrates, on Nietzsche's reading, killed tragedy, and

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 14-15.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 23.

¹¹² Ibid, 40.

¹¹³ Ibid, 60-64.

Nietzsche wants to bring it back. The way in which Nietzsche argues for tragedy is the same way in which he argues against a focus on history and knowledge without an end in mind. Nietzsche does not want to destroy history, or science or any of these things—he wants them to return to a more nuanced and balanced *tragic* view of the world so that they can be used to cultivate life. In perceiving Nietzsche as an anti-modern, it is clear that Habermas' conception of modernism privileges rationality and misses the ultimate goal of modernism: theoretical freedom.

Beyond Good and Evil

We now have a defense for an alternate interpretation of Nietzsche's views in the works Habermas cites. However, there is still more that can be said arguing in favor of Nietzsche being a modern. Our best bet for that sort of thing is in *Beyond Good and Evil*. To be fair to the post-moderns and Habermas, Nietzsche says in *Ecce Homo* that *Beyond Good and Evil* is a critique of modernity, and that he is as *unmodern* as possible.¹¹⁴ Two things can be said about this statement. First, this is once again an issue of distinguishing between the modern tradition as we have been speaking of it and "modernity" in the "contemporary age" sense. Second, we should note that Nietzsche does not say he is anti-modern—rather, he says he is *unmodern*. This, taken in context with the previous consideration, points to an interpretation of the statement in which Nietzsche is saying he does not belong to his contemporary age. This itself can be seen as a symptom of an extreme version of the sort of modernism we have been talking about. Nietzsche, in this sense, finds little in tradition worth preserving and attempts to critique all of it. While this

¹¹⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Ecce Homo." In *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, translated by Judith Norman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 135.

sort of extreme modernism might resemble post-modernism on a superficial level, Nietzsche is clearly not an anti-foundationalist. As we said in discussing Habermas' interpretation, Nietzsche believes we *need* foundations.

So, while *Beyond Good and Evil* is most definitely a critique of the age Nietzsche writes in, it is more in line with what we have said about the modern tradition than perhaps any other work at the time. On close inspection, we can actually find statements that undergird those made by Quine and Churchland. Even if Quine and Churchland would not list Nietzsche as an influence, there is a case to be made that he is something of a kindred spirit—albeit a strange and somewhat bombastic kindred spirit. Such a case goes as follows. Nietzsche starts *Beyond Good and Evil* with a question that is indicative of his entire viewpoint: "Suppose that truth is a woman – and why not? Aren't there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women?"¹¹⁵ This question encapsulates Nietzsche's overall thrust to rid philosophy of dogma—to attack even those things that we have held at the center of our conceptual frameworks for thousands of years. For example, a belief in the opposition of values.¹¹⁶

Nietzsche asks us to question the distinction between "truth" and "falsehood." Incorporating our discussion of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche wants us to find a middle ground where the two are not separate and oppositional, but rather two sides of the same coin. This coin is "perspectivism." Nietzsche's "perspectivism" replaces the traditional conception of truth and objectivity with subjectivity, and insists that we view our

¹¹⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 6.

statements about the world as entirely context dependent—dependent on who we are, where we are from, what society we live in etc. All of these contextual factors shape our perspective, and no one individual has *the* "true" perspective. However, this is not a limitless subjectivism. For Nietzsche, we can judge a statement by how well it "promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates, the type."¹¹⁷ In other words, judgments should be considered pragmatically, with our goals in mind. This is what Nietzsche means by going "beyond good and evil."¹¹⁸

Derrida and the post-moderns have a goal in mind, but it leads them to a dead end. While moderns like Quine and Churchland make epistemology coextensive with science, the post-moderns, according to Habermas, limit themselves to epistemology. Derrida, in cutting himself off from ontology and traditional metaphysics as a whole (his metaphysical homelessness), limits himself to talking about "the play of differences" as the sole means of talking about the world. While "the play of differences" can certainly be seen as a way of talking about how we know what we know, it does nothing more, and allows no further progress. The fact that such a philosophy would be intended to shake modernism to its core is laughable for Nietzsche. Nietzsche says that "[a] philosophy reduced to 'epistemology,' which is really no more than a timid epochism and doctrine of abstinence; a philosophy that does not even get over the threshold and scrupulously *denies* itself the right of entry – that is a philosophy in its last gasps, an end, an agony, something to be pitied."¹¹⁹ He goes further to ask, rhetorically, how a philosophy like that could possibly dominate. To be fair, Nietzsche is talking in this case about the state of

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 95.

philosophy in the 1880s as it is embattled by positivism, but his criticism is no less applicable to post-modernism.

Nietzsche can also be seen as supporting some aspects of Quine's and Churchland's accounts of language and meaning. Nietzsche believes that we must declare war on the "atomistic need" of past philosophy and science.¹²⁰ Quine attacks this atomistic need through a discussion of semantic holism, and meaning's existence as part of an overarching conceptual system. In doing so, he follows a path that brings mythological aspects of knowledge back into the picture. By doing this, he incorporates Nietzsche's belief that "[w]e are the ones who invented causation, succession, for-each-other, relativity, compulsion, numbers, law, freedom, grounds, purpose; and if we project and inscribe this symbol world onto things as an "in-itself," then this is the way we have always done things, namely *mythologically*."¹²¹ Churchland further attacks the atomistic need of philosophy and science by shifting to a less logocentric account of meaning, and continuing to view meaning and knowledge along holistic lines. Churchland even incorporates some amount of Nietzsche's perspectivism in his contention that each individual has their own particular peculiar world portrayals.

The only difference from Nietzsche here is that Churchland, along with Habermas, is willing to say that language can bridge these gaps; that there is something productive in our pursuit of consensus. However, this difference in beliefs about the possibility of bridging perspectival gaps is not evidence that Nietzsche was anti-modern, but rather it is evidence that he was not an optimist. He was a more skeptical modern than either Quine or Churchland, to be sure, but he was not a pessimist in the way the post-

¹²⁰ Ibid, 14.

¹²¹ Ibid, 21.

moderns are pessimists. This is because, for Nietzsche, "True philosophers reach for the future with a creative hand and everything that is and was becomes a means, a tool, a hammer for them."¹²² The post-moderns seem to want to reach for the future, but they have discarded everything that "is and was" and in so doing, they have cut off any hope of ever moving forward.

The fact that Nietzsche is ever cited in support of post modernism comes down to two things. The first, as we keep saying, is a misunderstanding surrounding the term "modern" and Nietzsche's use of it. The second, is a misinterpretation of Nietzsche more generally. The first misunderstanding can be seen as simple anachronism, the second has to at some point be considered willful. Deleuze hints at as much in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, through his discussion of enclage. Regardless, supposing we were to take the first issue, in which post-moderns mistake Nietzsche's use of the term modern due to an anachronism, and grant them that one. Suppose Nietzsche really is anti-modern in the sense he would need to be to serve as an effective touchstone for post-modernism. Even then, the post-modern movement is not one Nietzsche would support based on their inability to draw a horizon—to find their footing, to have a foundation. Even if Nietzsche wasn't a modern in the strict sense, the post-moderns still get him wrong because they are anti-foundationalists. The post-modern movement, if it is going to claim Nietzsche as its founder, is an obvious misstep. Not only do they have nothing to stand on currently, they have nothing to stand on historically. Post-modernism, if it keeps using Nietzsche as a touchstone is more than just a false start: it is a failure of Nietzschean philosophy as a whole.

¹²² Ibid, 106.

CHAPTER V

AN EXTENDED METAPHOR

In concluding our discussion of modern philosophy and its conflict with post-modernism, I would like to offer a less straightforward and more metaphorical retelling. The primary purpose of this retelling is to put forward a view of the modern enterprise that strips away all the incidental and contingent facts of modernism we have discovered through the course of this investigation of modern accounts of language and meaning and get at the heart of modernity. In this case we will attempt such a retelling by discussing modernity as if it were a dream. However, this is not to say that modernity is a dream in the wishful “goal” sense, but rather to speak of it as an actual dream—a dream in a long line of shared dreams involving all of humanity. With modernity presented as a dream, we can distinguish what makes modernity unique in relation to those dreams that came before it, and the nocturnal deviations that have arisen within it. The second purpose of this retelling is to argue for modernity’s continued existence and wholehearted revitalization as a joint effort between philosophers working in both the analytic and continental traditions. This will necessarily follow from reading modernity as a dream.

So, how are we to take the title of this investigation, “The Dream of Modernity?” It would seem that at times it has been met with anticipation, hope and other positive feelings, while at others it has been laughed off as impossible, or naïve. All of these interpretations rely on a reading of the phrase in terms of goals and ambitions. The “dream” of modernity is then given over to a sense of success that is yet to come, and we have made a strong case for this sort of interpretation. But what if the phrase were taken more literally? What happens when “the dream of modernity” is read as referring to an

actual dream? What sort of dream would it be? Would it be a brilliant adventure in some strange fantastical land, or a nightmare in which there is no escape from our failures?

Further, what would it say about us as dreamers?

If we are to take the phrase in this “actual dream” sense, the answer to the question “what kind of dream is it?” is clear: it is a lucid dream. Why a lucid dream? Kant’s “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” is best able to address this. For Kant, enlightenment is “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.”¹²³ What makes this immaturity self-incurred, for Kant, is an inability to use reason without guidance. Kant gives examples of the ways we avoid using reason without guidance: a reliance on books instead of taking responsibility for our understanding, a reliance on the clergy to decide moral issues instead of consulting our own consciences etc. What these avoidance measure all have in common is laziness and cowardice.

Kant further attacks the pre-modern reliance on rules as “shackles” that prevent humanity from taking advantage of its own natural gifts.¹²⁴ For Kant, these sorts of rules attempt to impose boundaries on what is knowable. In this way, one age conspires “to place a succeeding one in a condition whereby it would be impossible for the later age to expand its knowledge.”¹²⁵ Kant believes this act of binding to be in opposition to human nature, which is specifically focused on the progress of knowledge. It is this sort of optimism about the human condition that leads Kant to say that so long as humanity manages to avoid inventing artifices to keep us from progress, we will inevitably move forward.

¹²³ Kant, Immanuel. "What is Enlightenment?," 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 2.

What is it about Kant's account of enlightenment that allows us to say that modernity, taken as a dream, is a lucid dream? Lucidity, as in all things, implies being able to think clearly and rationally. This concept of lucidity is obviously important to the modern enterprise, and Kant's focus on talking about reason in his "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" is straightforward evidence of this fact. However, in relation to dreams, "lucid" takes on a further connotation: awareness on the part of the dreamer that they are dreaming. This is somewhat harder to pin down in Kant. Kant never makes a grand metaphysical claim that we are all dreaming, so if we are to find a connection to lucid dreaming in Kant, it must be a metaphorical connection—a connection that preserves the sense of lucid dreaming but which does not necessitate grandiose metaphysics. This connection is found in awareness.

Kant does not simply want us to use reason—surely, we had been using reason all along to some degree. Rather, Kant wants us to be aware of the world we are in, and apprehend it as burdened with traditions and structures that limit human reason and the expansion of knowledge. For Kant, this means realizing the fact of our own freedom to use reason, and with it, the responsibility to use it without getting caught up in artifices that prevent progress. In this way, Kant's awareness of reason, and our freedom to use it, speaks to the sense of lucid dreaming in which the dreamer is aware of the fact that they are dreaming, and able to take responsibility for their actions within the dream—perhaps even consciously pushing the dream in a particular direction.

In this way, Kant represents one of the first truly "lucid" thinkers of modern philosophy. Modernism thus defined entails an awareness of freedom, the wish to cast aside presuppositions, and a willingness to take responsibility. Descartes, Leibniz, and

Spinoza all got close to this principle of lucidity, but failed due to their own reliance on presuppositions. Kant also succumbed to his presuppositions at times, but managed to see the problem as it was: we had been pursuing knowledge as if asleep. We would flit about, not questioning the things given to us—society and tradition stood in for the individual and so there was no innovation, and no responsibility. In seeing this, Kant was the first to have the lucid realization that all was not as it seemed. So, like a lucid dreamer looking at a clock twice within close succession and receiving vastly different reports each time, he saw the flaw in the illusions we had made for ourselves. Kant's solution was to give reason back to the individual. However, this was not without objections.

Hegel in particular takes issue with Kant's emphasis on the individual's use of reason, and the sense of freedom that drives Kant's arguments against tradition. Hegel believes Kant's focus on the individual rational subject leaves out a significant part of the picture. For Hegel, the focus is not on individuals, it is on the world history of Spirit. It is important to note, however that "[t]he term "world" includes both physical and mental nature."¹²⁶ In this way, Spirit is the historical movement of both physical and mental toward the absolute. According to Hegel, reason is involved in this process, but not as a tool. Rather than individuals driving reason (as in Kant), reason drives individuals in the pursuit of the absolute.

However, this is not to say that individuals are simple cogs in a great machine of reason. Hegel's idea of Spirit incorporates individuals, and relies on them to create a larger sense of societal freedom.¹²⁷ So, while it can appear that individuals are at the

¹²⁶ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. "Freedom, The Individual, and the State." In *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 19.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 20.

mercy of circumstance, being together in Spirit, they are caught up in a process by which they freely come to know the absolute. For Hegel, the realization of this sort of freedom—the freedom of Spirit as a whole in all its worldliness—is the process that makes up all of history.¹²⁸ In this sense, Hegel is concerned with societal self-consciousness and self-determination where Kant is concerned with individual self-consciousness and self-determination.

When it comes to our reading of modernity as a dream, through Hegel's concept of self-consciousness and self-determination, we arrive at a view of modernity that is more nuanced than the one presented by Kant. Kant, in his focus on individuals, was unable to account for modernity as a shared dream. There was the implication in Kant that if we all acted as rational individuals there would be progress, but the "we all" was left unexplained. Hegel rectifies this by uniting us all together in Spirit. Unfortunately, this is not without issues. In uniting us all together in Spirit, Hegel forces us into the pursuit of an end—the absolute. This, in itself, is not necessarily problematic for our reading of modernity as a lucid dream. However, in doing this, Hegel traces our pursuit of the absolute back through history and ties all of the present to the past and future—transfiguring it into just one moment of an inevitable movement toward the absolute. This has the effect of placing modernity in a historical context, but it also burdens modernity with the tasks of the ages before it, thus taking away the novelty that one would typically use to delineate a "lucid" dream from a normal dream. In this way, Hegel takes the ultimate freedom, the total control—and thus some amount of the lucidity—out of the

¹²⁸ Ibid, 21.

dream of modernity. The casting aside of presuppositions becomes a simple moment in a larger whole, and thus novelty is subsumed.

Hegel reminds us that modernity is a shared dream, but in reading it in such a historical way, he takes the lucidity out of it. Kant may have focused too much on the individual, but Hegel focuses too much on the historical and thus ties us to those traditions Kant asked us to question. In this way, Hegel marked the beginning of a historicism that threatened to paralyze modernity, and return us to the undifferentiated mass of dreams that came before it.

It is at this point that Nietzsche saves the dream of modernity, and reawakens the sense of lucidity presented by Kant in an even more robust manner than Kant. For Nietzsche, modernism after Hegel was pessimistic. However, he wondered if this pessimism could be due not to weakness, but to strength. In this sense, he wondered if modern pessimism of his day could be due to “[a]n intellectual preference for the hard, gruesome, malevolent and problematic aspects of existence which comes from a feeling of well-being, from overflowing health, from an *abundance* of existence.”¹²⁹

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche contends that this pessimism is due to the fact that modernism had come to realize the true nature of existence. For Nietzsche, this meant seeing the world as utterly meaningless. Nietzsche contends that the only way out of this realization is through art: “Art alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live.”¹³⁰ Modern pessimism is then due to the fact that modernism hadn’t taken itself to

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 4.

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 40.

be artistic; it had taken itself, along Hegelian lines, to be carrying out a divine process toward the absolute rather than covering over the absolute with reason.

In other words, modernism was mistaken about what it was doing. In obsessing itself with reason and freedom, it lost sight of the true nature of reality, and in finally coming into contact with it in a roundabout manner, found itself repulsed. The problem was not so much reason, but that we lost sight of the artistic nature of reason. In this vein he calls for using reason creatively and realizing that the meaning of reality is not given to us, but created by us to cover over the meaninglessness of existence.¹³¹ This leads Nietzsche to take up a position as an anti-dogmatist. Dogmatism is then the primary issue when it comes to our pursuit of “truth” in modernism.¹³² It is this distaste for dogmatism that leads Nietzsche to say that truth/falsity are not at issue but rather “how far the judgment promotes and preserves life, how well it preserves, and perhaps even cultivates, the type.”¹³³

We said before that Nietzsche “saves” the dream of modernity and reawakens the sense of lucidity—how does all of the preceding manage to do that? Nietzsche saves the dream of modernity by shifting the pessimism of the modern enterprise onto a realization of the true nature of reality. In this way, Nietzsche is able to explain the failures of modernity while still allowing us to move forward as moderns. The sense of lucidity is restored in the subsequent realization that we are, in a very significant way, dreamers. For Nietzsche, all art is dreamlike, and when we realize that knowledge itself is artistic, we

¹³¹ Ibid, 19.

¹³² Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3.

¹³³ Ibid, 7.

realize that we are dreamers—engaging in the creation of dreamlike images that we use to cover over the void of meaning inherent in the world.

In this sense, Nietzsche is the first to question the place of reason within our dreaming, and he is the first to fully realize modernity as inherently creative. The result is that the concerns of Hegel and Kant with regard to the locus of freedom are not relevant for Nietzsche. We as individuals are engaging in the creation and manipulation of dreamlike images together with each other—privileging either side of the equation is a mistake, just as it is a mistake to read some sort of order into the process. We put order and meaning into the world where there was none before. In this sense, Nietzsche is the closest to a lucid dreamer out of all the moderns—not only does he question what we have been given, he acknowledges that we are ultimately the source of what we have been given. If we are comfortable saying that modernism is a lucid dream, then Nietzsche is the most modern of the moderns.

Despite Nietzsche's efforts to revitalize the modern tradition, by the early 20th century, much of modernism had once again relapsed into modes of inquiry that took themselves to be carrying out either a Kantian cold discovery of truths or a Hegelian march toward the absolute. The result was, on the one hand, philosophy that became burdened with the intricacies of language, and an attempt to determine *the* structure of language; and on the other hand, philosophy that found itself entirely unable to comment on external truths, and that had retreated to a discussion of human experience. Both of these traditions, while still modern, lost sight of lucidity due to their relinquishing the creative aspects of reason.

Over time, the continental tradition's growing pessimism gave rise to thinkers like Hannah Arendt. For Arendt, the modern tradition is defined by its pessimism. In Arendt, the doubt that Kant wished us to apply to the old traditions is thought to have been generalized to all of knowledge. This is in some sense the paradox of the modern tradition—it allowed for the natural sciences to rise and give birth to a vast amount of knowledge and power, but at the same time it led to “the hardly less demonstrable increase in human despair or the specifically modern nihilism which has spread to ever larger sections of the population.”¹³⁴ For Arendt, this despair is rooted in alienation. According to Arendt, throughout the history of modernism we became more and more alienated—from the world and then from the earth itself.¹³⁵ This alienation has led to the fact that while modern philosophy was always in some sense pessimistic (at least about the current state of affairs) modernism itself became pessimistic, and this leads Arendt to say that there is no cheerfulness left in the modern tradition.¹³⁶

If we are to still speak of modernism as a dream, we can see Arendt arguing that the dream of modernism has turned into a nightmare—or a fever dream. What control we had over the course of the dream has been given up to the structures we have created. However, we can also see how Arendt's comments on modernism are the result of modernism not incorporating the Nietzschean conception of the world and creative reason. Alienation is impossible in a modernism that sees its products as wholly creative, human attempts to create meaning in the world. However, it is easy to say that Nietzsche is the answer—it's another to actually embrace the Nietzschean concept of modernism,

¹³⁴ Arendt, Hannah. "The Vita Activa and the Modern Age." In *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 261.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 264.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 273.

which is something that seemed wholly impossible given the mood of contemporary philosophy at the time Arendt was writing.

However, the road back to Nietzsche has been in the process of being built for a number of years. In the analytic (Kantian) tradition, this road began with Quine's semantic holism, and has now been taken over by Paul Churchland and other contemporary philosophers of mind who have devoted themselves to modern science and subsequently been forced to come to grips with the strange, horrible questions Nietzsche warned us about. In the continental (Hegelian) tradition, the road back to Nietzsche has been championed by Habermas, with his emphasis on communicative reason and progress. Churchland and Habermas value both reason, and the "we all" aspect of reason. The result is that they ask us to take up Kant and Hegel in ways that bring us closer to Nietzsche than anyone has dared to go in years.

Habermas' concept of communicative reason relies on a view of reason that takes Kant's wish for progress along with Hegel's point that we progress together as a group and joins them together. Whoever has been trained in Habermas' communicative reason is then able "to take up and to transform into one another the perspectives of the first, second, and third persons."¹³⁷ In other words, through communicative reason we are able to overcome the hurdles of subjectivity together, in pursuit of mutual understanding (not the absolute). This is not explicitly Nietzschean, nor is Churchland's Neurosemantics, but in resolving the Kantian/Hegelian split without resorting to either the Kantian issue of rampant subjectivity, or the Hegelian issue of binding, it is a firm step in the right direction toward a reawakening of modernism as a shared lucid dream.

¹³⁷ Habermas, Jürgen. "An Alternative Way," 287.

Needless to say, when we read modernity as an actual dream, it is plain that the dream is not over. To paraphrase Nietzsche; it is now beginning to dawn on a few minds that positivism and other incidental aspects of modernity are only interpretations of modernity, not explanations of it. It is no small irony that the movement that most frequently drew on Nietzsche—post-modernism—has failed to secure a sure footing, and moves steadfastly away from Nietzsche while the Kantian and Hegelian traditions are coming back to him. This is due to the post-modern tradition's inability to see modernism as a lucid dream. Post modernism finds itself so pre-occupied with the incidental failures of the modern tradition that it is unable to see that the clock on the wall just moved forward five hours in the last fifteen minutes. Instead of taking the failures of modernism post-Nietzsche as a sign of lost lucidity, and the realization that we are ultimately free to create, they infer that modernism was just a normal dream after all—that there is no such thing as lucid dreams, and that we shouldn't even bother trying. This attitude is far more dangerous than the naïve relapses modernism has had into simple dreaming because it embraces relapse, and encourages us to go back to sleep.

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